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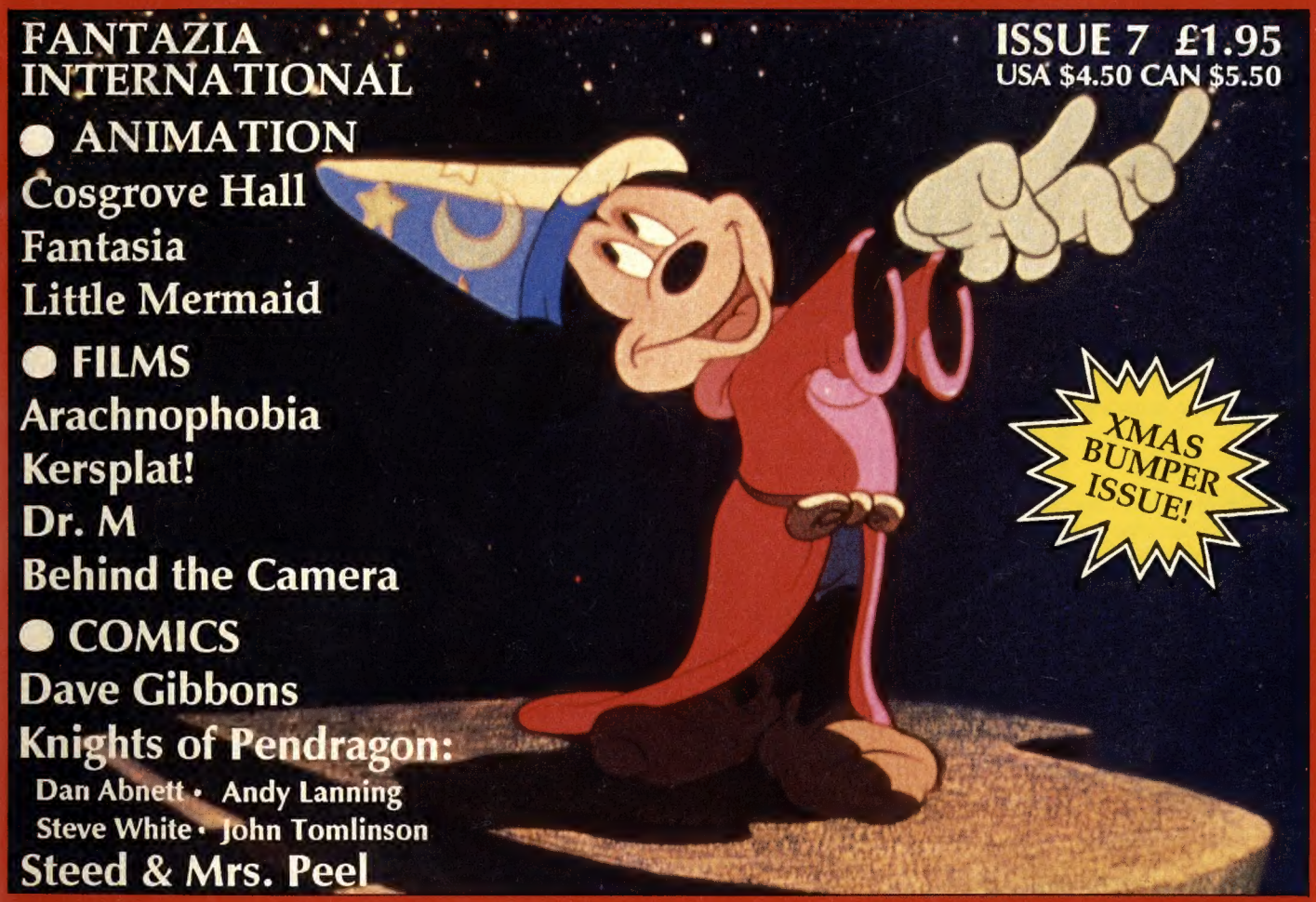
The definitive superhero magazine



FANTAZIA INTERNATIONAL

ISSUE 7 £1.95
USA $4.50 CAN $5.50

- ANIMATION

Cosgrove Hall
Fantasia
Little Mermaid

- FILMS

Arachnophobia
Kersplat!
Dr. M
Behind the Camera

- COMICS

Dave Gibbons
Knights of Pendragon:
Dan Abnett • Andy Lanning
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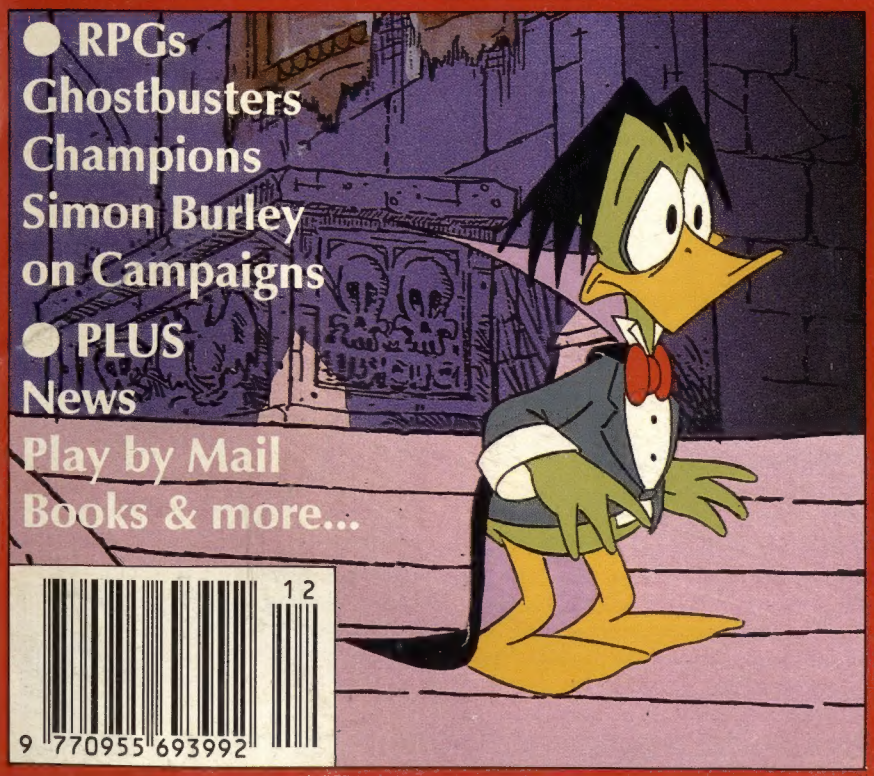

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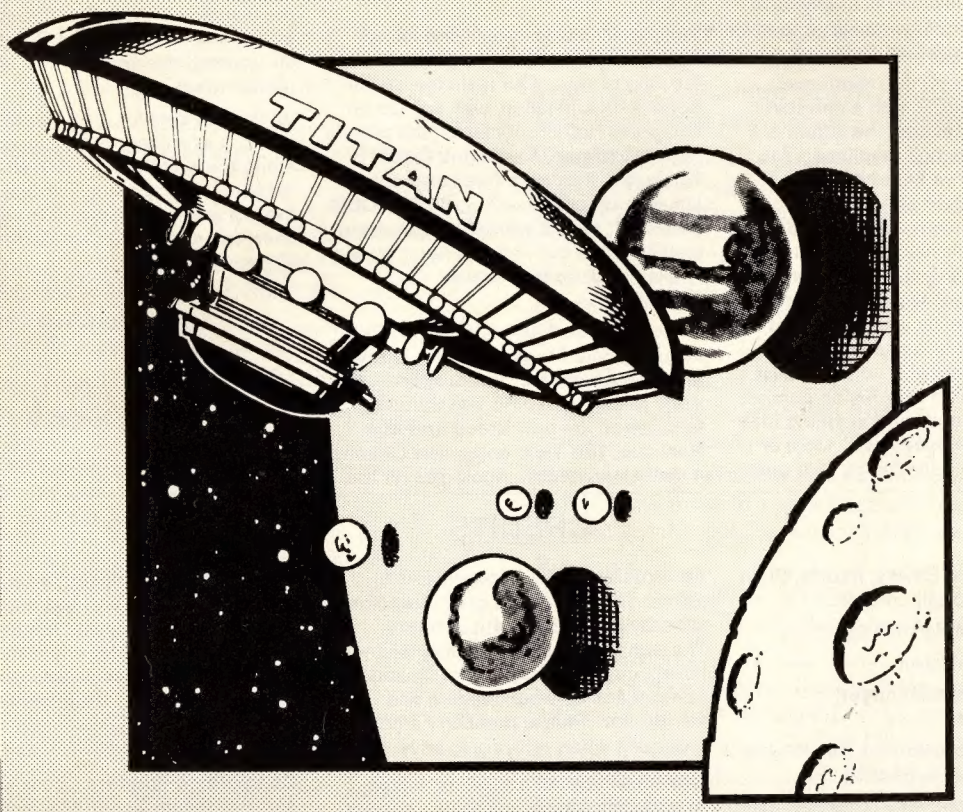

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FANTAZIA

The definitive superhero magazine

A festive greeting to you all! As 1990 draws to a close we see the year out with a bang and yet another extended issue of **Fantazia**. If you will allow me the indulgence, I'd like to briefly look back over 1990 and what we've tried to do with this magazine:

We started out with the intention of providing the public with a newstand magazine that covered the superhero genre in all of its rich mediums. You know that - you've heard it a million times before. Over seven issues, **Fantazia** has grown and matured into a magazine we are now quite proud of. Although we still fly the 'superhero' flag, you may have noticed it is by no means all we cover, merely a starting point and rough guideline to a multi-media magazine that will give you the latest news, reviews and features on comics, films, games, books and anything else that catches our beady eye. Most of you seem to be quite happy with our present format, but we'd still like to hear any ideas that you may have on this subject. 1991 will see some exciting developments in **Fantazia** - watch this space.

Back to this issue - you'll find lots of light-hearted merriment on offer to suit the time of year. Our main feature this issue is on animation, with articles on Cosgrove Hall Productions (the people behind **Danger Mouse** and **Count Duckula**), **Fantasia** (well we could't leave it out, could we?), and **The Little Mermaid**; **plus** a special double-sized installment of our resident hero, Spring Heeled Jack, in marvelous Technicolour.

Of course, you'll also find much more, including interviews with Dave Gibbons and **The Knights of Pendragon** team, Andy Mangels Behind The Camera, features on the new **Steed and Mrs. Peel** title, **The Tick**, and a new Channel 4 series on comics. Apologies for the exclusion of the piece on Grant Morisson's stage play **Depravity**: it **will** appear next issue.

Subscribers will find even more than the rest of you - with the inclusion from last issue of **The Bulletin Pull-it-Out** - an updated newsheet giving up to the minute news.

All that remains for me to do this year is to thank everyone who's helped us along the way during 1990, all our readers for supporting **Fantazia** over the last seven issues, and to wish everyone a Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year!

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Contributions: of artwork or written material are always welcome - contact the address above for submissions guidelines, enclosing a stamped addressed envelope. However, Fantazia cannot be held responsible for loss or damage of unsolicited material. Deadline for issue 8 is 1st January.

Competitions: will be judged on their listed closing date, and winners' names will be published in the earliest possible issue. No correspondence can be entered into and the judge's decision is final. In the event of a published prize not being available due to circumstances beyond Fantazia's control, a suitable alternative of similar value will be provided.

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Competition Winners (from issue 5) are: Rob Milne, Calum Macleod, Alun Fairburn, S. Edwards, Jon Clopp, Steve Auger, Terry Powley, Daniel Moss, Stephen Coyne, Andrew Ruffler, Barry Crozier, Simon Fraser, Paul Grimsley, Charlie Statham, P. Southern and Sigurd Towrie.

Thanks To: Jez Hall at Cosgrove Hall for the friendly guided tour, Phil at Nostalgia and Comics for his usual and helpful input, everyone who's so far co-operated with our New Years Resolutions list, everyone at Marvel U.K. for putting up with the Birch and taking him to lunch, Marika, Penda, Jean-Paul and Lawrence for the broken nose and the sandwich, Mike Grainger for going with the flow, Tom Lynton and his anti thunder sheet attachment (remembered it!), Robert Yeung for his subterfuge (well done Rob), Tim Robins for his professionalism (Jumping on a fast moving train), Louise for all her good work (You will be missed), Gregg (a comrade in arms), the Sisters of Mercy for the 24th and 26th November (Rise and Reverberate). Also to Sara for absolutely everything (including the Coca-Cola but especially for the new year), Nescafe coffee (stimulant), Marlboro cigarettes (necessity), and fanheaters (comfort).

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Bare Facts

Marvel UK's **Strip** magazine has been cancelled with its twentieth issue. Editor Dan Abnett commented on the collapse of the title: "There's probably a larger number of people in this country who are extremely serious about the way comics are opening up for adults, but there's not a large enough number to get a huge best-seller going overnight. The sort of material that we were bringing over from France and Spain is the sort of material that, I guess, we ourselves would like to read, and we expected this mythical gap in the market where people wanted to read adult comics, and it didn't exist really ... Because a comic is seen as an adult comic it seems to necessitate that it become terribly serious, and therefore automatically quite dry and uneventful, and **Viz** is living proof of what adults really want to read - It's just very entertaining and possibly outrageous and that can mean masochistic humour or some great pieces of escapist entertainment. I think any replacement of **Strip** would be a great deal more punchy, fast, exciting, adventure orientated."

Indeed it does appear that work is already underway for a new anthology from the company, with plans for a Spring 1991 debut.

The eagerly awaited **Night Raven: House of Cards**, intended for serialisation in **Strip**, by David Lloyd and Jamie Delano will now see publication as a wholly new gn around March.

As a taster for our interview later in the magazine, here's a run down of the next few issues of **The Knights of Pendragon**: #8, a Mark Farmer cover, plus Simon Bisley poster featuring #6's cover. As Captain Britain and Union Jack race to save Kate McClellan's son from an unholy union with the Bane, the villain who has been plaguing The Knights of Pendragon since issue 1.

Inside the John Bolton cover for issue 9, they are still searching for Kate McClellan's son, whilst Dai Thomas interrogates the Jigsaw Man. Also the Pendragons meet someone who is battling to stop the Dolphin massacre in Northern Scotland.

London is turning into a battlefield in issue 10 as Kate McClellan uses Captain Britain and Union Jack to help rescue her son from the grip of the evil Bane. But the battle is inconclusive and the heroic trio are left to join fellow Pendragon Ben Gallagher, as he nears the end of his quest for the Holy Grail. However, the Pendragons have no idea that they are walking into the slavering jaws of Bane. Ambush!

Andrew Cartmel, the last script editor to date of Doctor Who's television adventures is taking the helm on **Doctor Who Magazine**'s comic strip. His first regular scripting chores begin next year with an EC Comic-inspired Cyberman story titled 'The Good Soldier'.

Carmel script edited all three of the Seventh Doctors' television seasons, helping to shape the way Scottish actor Sylvester McCoy interpreted the role. He's a keen comics reader and it's known that two comic stories by the writer Alan Moore were put on potential script writers reading lists while he worked on the show - **2000AD**'s 'The Ballad of Halo Jones' and DC Comics' **Watchmen** epic. With the TV series still waiting a decision on its future, Marvel have appointed Andrew the regular scripter on the Doctor Who comic strip, to develop themes and ideas that had only started to develop in recent television stories.

In addition to bringing the strip more in line with the television series' 'continuity', Marvel are working closely with BBC Enterprises to keep Doctor Who in the public eye while it is off air. **DWM** is giving full promotion to continuing video releases and repeats of old stories, in Britain and abroad. It has also already scheduled one new Doctor Who project in addition to the **DWM**. This is a sixty-four page Year Book, scheduled for release later in 1991 along with Marvel's full range of annuals.

Doctor Who Magazine increased its page count to forty-four pages recently, enabling more room for colour features and an increased fiction section (in addition to the comic strip). Plans for several Doctor Who projects are also under consideration for future publication. The licensed record based on the Who-inspired Marvel character Abslom Daak - Dalek Killer goes on full release in January.

"Of course it's disappointing that Doctor Who isn't being made at present," said **DWM** Editor John Freeman, "But we're still confident it will return and that the long awaited film is still on course for release. The programme's lasted twenty-seven years - it's a major cult show, just like Star Trek. At the moment, I can't forsee a time when Marvel won't be producing some form of Doctor Who tie-in, and we're happy to continue the legend."

Marvel UK's Managing Director and Managing Editor have recently left the company, with the individuals who will replace them to be announced shortly.

Although nothing is certain yet, the possibility of **Abslom Daak** and **Death's Head** mini-series may see fruition in the new year. As well might a **Man From Cancer** book collection and a continuation of the character 'Rorkue' seen in **Strip #4** by John Freeman and Liam Sharp in some form as yet undecided.

International Children's Rights Day

As mentioned in issue five of the magazine, Birmingham Social Services organised a competition to celebrate the first anniversary of the signing of the Convention on the Rights of the Child. The response was overwhelming - entries from hundreds of schools. The judges had a hard decision to make but finally came up with the following winners:

Fozia Mahmood, 6 years old - Infant Section.

Sheena Shryane, 9 years old - Junior Section.

Chris Pollard, 15 years old - Senior Section.

We hope this was a memorable day for children throughout the world and that they continue to have a memorable life.

Three Against Ming

Is the subtitle of Kitchen Sink's **Alex Raymond's Flash Gordon: Volume 2** coming in February. Measuring 12" by 9", the 112-page books will be printed in glossy colour in h/c only.

Probably one of the most famous comic strips of all time, spawning 3 movies and assorted merchandising spin-offs, in this volume Flash, Dale and Dr. Zarkov scheme and battle their way across the planet Mongo, meeting assorted races, only ever one step away from the clutches of the implacable Ming the Merciless. Having already published the Kurtzman/Barry run on Flash Gordon, after Raymond's 10 year duration are completed, Kitchen Sink plan to collect Austin Briggs' and Mac Raboys' versions.

The Best of Bijou/Apex Treasury of Underground Comics is the 352-page compendium of 1975 being solicited from Kitchen Sink. Within its pages are the first Maus story by Art Spiegelman, Bill Griffith's Zippy the Pinhead before he began daily syndication, Gilbert Shelton with the Freak Bros. and Fat Freddy's Cat, plus more by the likes of Crumb, Deitch, Rodriguez, Flenniken, Lynch and Green.

Buzz #2 sees publication February. Edited by computer artist Mark Landman, #1 of the humour title appears to be selling out everywhere. Contributors to #2 include Charles Burns, Seth Deitch, Basil Wolverton, Drew Friedman and Jim Woodring. Look for unused material intended for Robert Crumb's Weirdo and Raw being seen in later issues.

Kitchen Sink will begin releasing a series of postcards featuring characters and titles published by the company, measuring 4" by 6" in full colour. The first seven will be **The Spirit** by W. Eisner, **Xenozoic Tales** and **Dinosaur Shaman**, both by M. Schultz, **Buzz** by M. Landman, **Omaha** by R. Waller and K. Worley, **Fritzi Ritz** and **Nancy Eats Food** both by E. Bushmiller.

Babe Ruth/Old Gold, Hopalong Cassidy Radio 2, Toonerville Trolley Toy, Red Ryder Action Bar and **Red Ryder Bread** are embossed tin signs!

And lest we be struck by lightning ... don't forget **The Spirit #76**.

Dead Men Tell No Tales

Fresh from the acclaimed **Hawkworld** series for DC; writer-artist Tim Truman, inker Queque Alcatena and colourist Sam Parsons will be reviving 30's pulp vigilante, **The Spider** in a 3-part prestige format detective thriller for Eclipse Comics.

"He's quite insane," Truman enthuses. "He enjoys the havoc he causes, but worries that his lunacy might be carrying over to his alter ego, millionaire Richard Wentworth."

The story is based loosely on the 1934 story **Corpse Cargo** by series originator Harry Steeger (writing as Grant Stockbridge). "A woman calling herself Captain Kidd uses an electronic device to fry occupants of passenger trains, and then heists their belongings," Truman says of the plot. "Some of the original story's characters are very two-dimensional, outrageous pulp figures. I've taken these pulp heroes and villains and established the psychology behind their actions, giving their obsessions motivation. As a result, there's a lot of crazy people running around!"

According to Truman it is set in a "30's view of the 90's - An America with the streamlined appearance of the 1939 World's Fair." Pencils for the first 2 issues are completed, but Eclipse will wait until the entire series is complete, before publishing the 48-page issues on a bi-monthly schedule.

Following on from their successful adaption of **The Hobbit**, Eclipse will premiere **Dragonflight**, Anne McCaffrey's first Dragonriders of Pern science fantasy novel in February. **Dragonflight** tells the story of Lessa, who comes of age and dares to reclaim her birthright as rider of the Queen Dragon, whilst a devastating interstellar threadfall returns, as a threat to all life on Pern.

Having consulted McCaffrey on characters and settings, Lela Dowling will pencil the 3-issue 48-page series, with Cynthia Martin painting Book 1 and Fred Von Tobel, Books 2 & 3. Fantasy artist Mark Ferrari will paint all covers, described as 'astounding' and Brynne Stephans will script.

Richard Matheson's 1954 classic **I am Legend** gets a 3-issue prestige b/w series in February also. Possibly the most influential of all vampire stories, it concerns Robert Neville the only man in his country immune to the virus that has turned everyone else into vampires.

Matheson felt neither of the 2 movie adaptions had succeeded, but approved of the comic adaption put forward by Steve Niles. The title will be illustrated by Elman Brown.

With the release of **The Hobbit Book 3** on September 12th, 1990 Eclipse issued their 1000th publication, placing the company as the 12th most prolific comic publisher in the history of the field, and 5th amongst those currently active.

"We've seen many publishers come and go over the past decade," commented publisher Dean Mullaney, who established the company with his brother Jan in 1977. "We are proud of our success and of the great crew of creators we've worked with during the past 12 years. We look forward to publishing our second 1000 titles in the 1990's."

Hard-Core

King Horror: Zero is the fifth and final issue of David Britton's **Hard-Core-Horror** gn in five parts. Available now from Savoy Books.

Nightfall Press

Noel Hannan considers himself to be the only British small press publisher putting out mainstream sf, fantasy and horror strip material on a regular basis. **Nightfall #3** is out soon moving to A4 size, with #4 on being completely comic strip orientated.

Further titles are intended, including graphic novels.

Simpsons Competition

Windstar International and **Fantazia** are giving away a life-size Bart Simpson and 5 runner-up prizes of a Bart Simpson standee to the first people out of the bag with the answers to the following:

1: Who does Bart's voice belong to?

2: What's the translation for one of Bart's favourite statements: "Don't have a cow, man!"?

3: What are the names of the five family members?

All entries must be received no later than **31st January 1991**, all standard competition rules apply. Answers on a postcard or sealed envelope, marked "Simpsons Competition" to the Fantazia address.

Apocalypse Now

Alongside the prestige format **Marshal Law: Kingdom of the Blind** by Pat Mills and Kevin O'Neill for the direct sales market, Apocalypse publishing released **Toxic! Presents #1** featuring the same storyline in the more traditional larger British size for newstand distribution.

Marshal Law is Apocalypse's first release with very healthy advance orders and a print run of 117,000 copies. This figure is higher than sales achieved by Epic, the previous **Marshal Law** publisher.

Toxic! Presents will be an ongoing title, the second issue highlighting the Clive Barker comic, **Primal**, and the third most likely to be Wagner, Grant and Kennedy's **Bogie Man** one-shot for the newstands.

It appears that **Primal** may now go from bi-monthly to quarterly schedule to allow artist John Van Fleet time to complete each issue to his satisfaction.

Toxic! the weekly colour anthology, is due to debut on March 23rd. When asked how he thought the comic would be received in light of the cancellation of **Revolver** and **Strip**, publisher Nigel McKie expressed a confidence that it would be a success.

The Aliens are coming...

Aliens and Predator Super Special is a trade paperback from Fictioneer, with over 120 pages collecting all such interviews published in **Comics Interview**.

The regular **Comics Interview #91** has the outspoken Neal Adams as its main feature, whilst it's the topic of Ghost Rider in #92.

These ship Jan-Feb 1991, as do **Comics Express #14 & 15** and **Comics Revue #57 & 58.**

After the Storm

The Silverstorm Collection will gather the **Silverstorm** mini-series from Aircel in February.

Written by Thomas Fortenberry and pencilled by Steven Butler (**Badger**), the main characters are 'Silver' Dollar and Tempest. Butler explained the concept behind it: "Tom had this crazy idea about the Forces of Good Vs. the forces of evil set in modern society; you know, Epic material that involved fate and all that other stuff beyond mortal reckoning... Me, I just wanted to draw this big guy who looks like a Sherman tank, beatin' up a bunch of bad guys. Well you put those two ideas together and that's basically what you have here!"

The Southern Squadron has proved popular and Aircel and David de Vries have agreed to do a new mini-series set for 1991.

Scheduled for January is **Deadwalkers**, a four-issue horror story by Christopher Weppler and John Grigni. In it zombies are revived accidentaly by an alien space ship that landed five years previously. It comes available in two cover versions, 'gross' and 'not-so-gross'.

Sheridan le Fanu's classic horror tale of lesbian vampirism begins its six-issue adaptation by Steve Jones and John Ross. Writing in **The Penguin Book of Vampire Stories**, editor Alan Ryan called le Fanu's **Carmilla**, "Not only one of the best but one of the most seminal stories in all vampire literature."

Dave Dormon provides #1's topless cover painting, to reduce retailer display problems it will be sealed in plastic with a paper wrapper.

So You Think You Can Draw?

To mark the release of **L. Ron Hubbard presents Writers of the Future, Volume IV**, recently published by New Era, the contest **L. Ron Hubbard's Illustrators of the Future Contest** has been launched.

This will be judged by top names in the SF and Fantasy illustration field, such as Frank Frazetta and Edd Cartier, with Frank Kelly-Freas as coordinating judge.

Started in the US over a year ago, the contest runs quarterly, with 3 prizes of £250 each quarter, plus the chance to compete for an additional £2,000 grand annual prize. Finalists in the contests will also receive a critique from Frank Kelly-Freas.

For further information, procure a copy of the above mentioned book for details or write, with a stamped addressed envelope, to: L. Ron Hubbard's Illustrators of the Future Contest, P.O. Box 134, Redhill, Surrey, RH1 2YL.

Upsurge in Back Issue Sales

Hero Graphics report that since the release of the first new issues of **Flare** and **League of Champions** revenues from in-house back issue sales have been up to $200 per week. Not bad for a back-issue list that contains only 52 different items. Those sales, as expected, are focused on early appearances of Flare. **Flare #1** is likely to be depleted completely by the end of the year. The pattern for sales of **Marksman Annual #1** is unclear, although Flare does have a minor appearance.

The orders received seem to fall into 2 patterns, those only interested in Flare and those completing collections. Back issue sales of **Eternity Smith** and **Captain Thunder** are minimal, but with Eternity Smith due to appear in **Flare #5** this may change.

Holstered

After a company meeting on 5th November, Igor Goldkind informed us of the cancellation of the Fleetway title **Revolver** with #7 published this month.

Revolver was launched in June 1990, expressly targetted for the 16-24 age group. The **Revolver** team had just finished a successful Halloween tour, and sales in the direct distribution market had proved favourable, but although comics represent up to 25% of periodical publishing in overseas markets, such as Japan, adult comics have yet to find a firm niche on the British newstands.

Publishing Director John Davidge, commented: "**Revolver** may not have succeeded and it is a sad day for all of us at Fleetway. However, the closure of this title does not imply a reversal of our overall strategy. We will continue to be very active in this area and indeed, will be shortly announcing major new initiatives."

Deadliest Game

Alien Mutant War #1 is slated for February release from a new Canadian publisher, BC.

The 26-page b/w interior comic offers a look at the nature of war and sports. In the Galactic War games alien warriors battle Earth mutants to the death on an asteriod arena.

J. Adams Walter pencils, with story and art by Stan Wong.

On The Air

In February Caliber Press release an all new series by Michael Lark entitled **Airwaves**.

Airwaves takes place in and around the art deco styled Capital City, where the government acts as a business in which political decisions are based solely on how they will affect the profit standing of the city.

Sound waves, controlling chemical impulses within the brain, are broadcast in the guise of "Top 40" music via radio, devised by the leaders of the city/business headed by the Director. A group of rebels discover this fact and decide to broadcast themselves on a pirate radio station, and appoint a mysterious leader called Zero.

The Director's influence is far reaching however, and the rebels are unsure who to trust, even amongst themselves.

Legendary singer Jon Pure has knowledge that can bring down the government, and the rebel group are anxious to find and convert him to their cause.

Initially **Airwaves** will ship monthly, with 4 issues completed before the first is published. The title is open ended, and Lark has a long range approach for it.

Publisher Gary Reed stated "I'm proud of all the books we do, but every once in a while, a new talent or project comes along, and it has that something special ... I think **Airwaves** and Lark will both find a huge following."

The **Deadworld** mini-series, **Rising of the Dead**, written by Randall Thayer, with art by Dan and David Day and covers by creator Vince Locke begins publication in January. Also out that month will be **Deadworld: Book 2** compiling issues 8-16.

Further titles in January are: **Startling Crime Illustrated #1** further issues to be published when completed; **Caliber Presents #19** including Mark Winfrey in the artist's sketchbook, and the new 'Taken Under' series by Lark and Debra Rodia; **Lost Angel** a 48-page special by Kevin Van Hook; **Ashes #5, Jazz Age Chronicles #6, Grafik Muzik #3** and the second issues of **Billy Nguyen** and **The Boston Bombers**.

The other new series from Caliber in February is **Nuclear Winter Blues** by **Northguard, Gaijin** and **Checkmate** artist Gabriel Morrissette. It is a post apocalyptic SF story where the harsh conditions of the nuclear winter makes just surviving the concern of everyday life.

Other February releases include **The Realm: Book IV** collecting #13-15, plus the 'Glitch' story from **Caliber Presents #3** and the one-shot **Silverfawn**. Artists include Guy Davis, Randy Zimmerman and Mark Winfrey. **Caliber Presents #20** has an R. G. Taylor sketchbook and a one-off Orlak story, and **Camelot Eternal** reaches its 5th issue. **Fringe** merchandising begins with a 'Bouncey' T-Shirt illustrated by Philip Hester.

Gary Chaloner on Ape Title

Southern Squadron's Gary Chaloner will be writing and pencilling the new four-issue series **Urchak's Folly** for Adventure Comics. Inks will be by fellow Australian, Dillon Naylor. It is planned for January release (The same time as Chaloner's **Olympians** series for Marvel's Epic line).

Set after Genral Ollo's defeat in the monthly **Planet of the Apes** title, it tells the tale of Sebastian Thorne, stranded out of time - his past forgotten. Placed in a penal colony sent from Ape City pushing West towards the unknown, danger is ever present and not helped by the insane gorilla, Colonel Urchak.

Chaloner commented: "I've always wanted to do a series like this ... Robert E. Howard and Edgar Rice Burroughs with a lot of unexplored elements from the **Apes** films thrown in," in summing up, "It's raw ... brutal ... savage!"

A Novel New Year

Marvel U.S. will be bringing out a number of books at the beginning of 1991. In January; the cosmic adventure featuring nearly everybody who was ever anybody in Marvel's main group, **Avengers: Korvac Saga** will see print, written by Jim Shooter, and illustrated by George Perez and David Wenzel.

In February; **Punisher: Intruder** is reprinted in softback, with the Baron, Reinhold and Zessman team setting up the Punisher against a super secret paramilitary organisation.

Hellraiser is a trade paperback collecting work chosen by Clive Barker himself from the popular Epic title. Artists include Bernie Wrightson, Ted McKeever and John Bolton.

Spider-Man: Fear Itself sees Gerry Conway, Ross Andru and Mike Esposito introducing two new villains, The Baroness and the White Ninja.

Shape Shifters

That's who the FemForce have to deal with in **Good Girl Quarterly Winter 1990** in a 10-page colour strip by Mark Moore and Chad Hunt. 'Sheena, Queen of the Jungle' is this issue's retrospective of Fiction House heroines. The remainder of the 52-page title is filled out with reprints of 'Camilla' by Matt Baker, and 'Firehair' by Bob Lubbes.

In FemForce #34, due February, Rik Levins, The Count and Mark Heike tell the first of a three-part story concluding the Black Shroud continuity which has been running through AC titles since 1983. The series will feature Fem Force, Sentinels of Justice, The Justice Squadron and the revived heroes from Dr. Weir's Asylum. Five full colour 2 and a quarter inch **FemForce** buttons will soon be available. AC will re-issue **Captain Paragon #3 & 4.**

Plans of Action

Eternity Comics have announced plans to release **Plan 9 from Outer Space: 30 years later!**, the authorised sequel to the "worst movie ever made." Debuting in January, written by John Wooley who adapted the original film for Eternity, and drawn by Joe Zabal, Greg Budgett and Gary Dumm (the latter two, contributors to **American Splendour**) it will be a three-issue series. Plan 10, as it were, involves replacing Earth's leaders with synthetic duplicates.

An agreement with film director Herk Harvey means **Carnival of Souls** will be adapted into comic book form. The 1962 film recently released on video has been critically received. Negotiations are underway with a potential creative team.

Eternity's second full colour title via arrangement with Full Moon Entertainment will be **Subspecies**. It is described as a sensual, dramatic vampire tale of two brothers with a unique twist. The movie, from an original idea by Charles Band and scripted by Jackson Barr is set for release early next year, and Eternity are looking for a May release for the comic. It will feature new adventures based on concepts and characters created for the film. The comic adapters will be announced shortly.

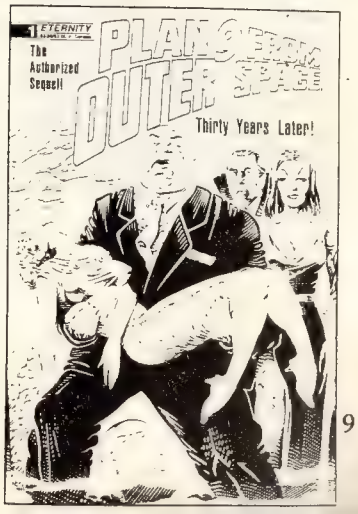
The 1930 science fiction novel **Gladiator**, by Philip Wylie will be adapted in 1991. The book inspired Jerry Siegel's creation of Superman.

Pentacle: The Sign of Fire is an all new four-issue series coming in February from **Men in Black** writer, Lowell Cunningham and illustrated by Scottish artist, John Ross.

Cunningham said that it "attempts to explore how a supernatural power affects the individual who possesses it."

In association with CBS TV, Eternity will be releasing the squarebound **I Love Lucy in Full Color #1** in January to coincide with the fortieth anniversary of the Lucille Ball TV series. It will collect five complete series, a one-page gag strip on the back cover and full colour photo front cover taken from the **Lucy** archives.

Dracula: The Lady in the Tomb is a one-issue adaption of Bram Stoker's short story **Dracula's Ghost**. It was originally written as the opening chapter to **Dracula**, but was eliminated in an attempt to shorten the already lengthy book. Stoker's wife had the story published in 1914, two years after his death. Due in January, the adaption is by Steven Phillip Jones and Robert Schnieders.



Kingdom of Champions Errata

Courtesy of Phil Masters, **Fantazia** brings you the errata for the latest (and British) **Champions** supplement. It is perhaps worth noting that this issue's scenario is taken from **KOC** material that was dropped because of space restrictions.

The following were left off the credits: Alison Brooks and Dave Flin were responsible for much of the factual text; they also provided many game ideas, especially on the New Knights. Albion is Alison's creation; Dave also came up with Pete Marsh.

John Mersh created Blazon, Mole and Partisan.

Oliver MacDonald created Swift Swallow.

Richard Howe provided ideas used in Yeoman and WeatheRing.

Jon Marshall-Potter designed much of STOP's structure.

(And all the players mentioned on the title page influenced the game material to greater or lesser extents.)

p.10: The example in column 2 should read: *The Bayou Prowler is the terror of the New Orleans underworld; he has a Reputation for this. In Louisiana, NPCs know him on 14-, but the GM has said that the characters will be recruited to a UN global team, and in Europe or Asia, the 'Prowler is just someone who gets rare mentions in the foreign news sections...* (and so on)

p.21: On this map, '3' is some way off to the right.

p.22: On this map, '3A' is

located in the park at bottom left.

p.25: Place some more numbers on this map; 7 immediately right of 13; 8 two rooms up from 9; 10 in the middle of the gallery on the right upstairs.

p.29: The pound and dollar prices for petrol are the wrong way round. Incidentally, please note that they are temporary and approximate, and that a British gallon is larger than a US gallon.

p.41: No, I don't know what that fellow on the right of the illustration is meant to be either. Scots? Italian? Space Alien?

p.71 (on): The scenario has overflowed its box. It continues from the top of column 2 and on to subsequent pages.

p.87: Column 1: A zero drifted in. The INLA has an estimated 100 members.

p.92: Assualt ships are capable of landing 650 marines into battle, and are armed with missiles for defence.

p.101: Illustration: Please note that a cricket wicket has *three* stumps!

p.124: Dr. GoldWing does 3.5D6 with his Jab, 7.5D6 with his Hook.

p.158: Note that each of the Four Winds has a Multipower when *not* linked to a suitable power source via a circlet, and an Elemental Control when so linked. (The powers and modifiers in the brackets depend on the power source; for each, the Multipower is as large as the largest slot, and all slots are variable.)

p.160: Breaking Glass' Rival is a senior VIPER Covert Agent, and she has a Secret ID and a 22pt. Villain Bonus.

p.168: DarkWing: Replace the first line in the character box with: Use *Dr. GoldWing's* character sheet for DarkWing, but DarkWing's...

p.175: The character box heading should be *STOP Agent*. The powers list will make perfect sense if you guess right what the line spacing/structure *should* be.

p.179: Strictly speaking, the first visitors to the islands must have been *pre*-Celtic.

p.191-193: Throughout this scenario (*The Coast Is Clear*), replace any references to 'Sussex' with 'Suffolk'.

p.206: One book title under 'History and Archaeology' was incomplete. It should have been *Scotland, Bloody Scotland*.

p.207: The 2nd line of the first para should go: *'... might be places to start: note that the emphasis here is on* detection *...*

[NEW PARAGRAPH]

Most British spy stories and thrillers ...'

p.207: Sorry about the cross-reference to another appendix (about other Hero System material and the UK) which got squeezed out. An edited version may eventually appear in the *Adventurer's Club* or A&E.

Happy Hacking!

Mindscape International are producing **Savage Empire**, the first from the new Worlds of Ultima series.

Avalon Hill announce **Legends of the Lost Realm** for the Mac, a combination strategy and arcade RPG-type computer game retailing at $39.95, made "best roleplaying game" by Macworld magazine in their December issue this year.

Loriciel have created a new label, Futura, to produce their simulation/strategy games, leaving Loriciel to produce their arcade/action-style titles.

Crow Competition

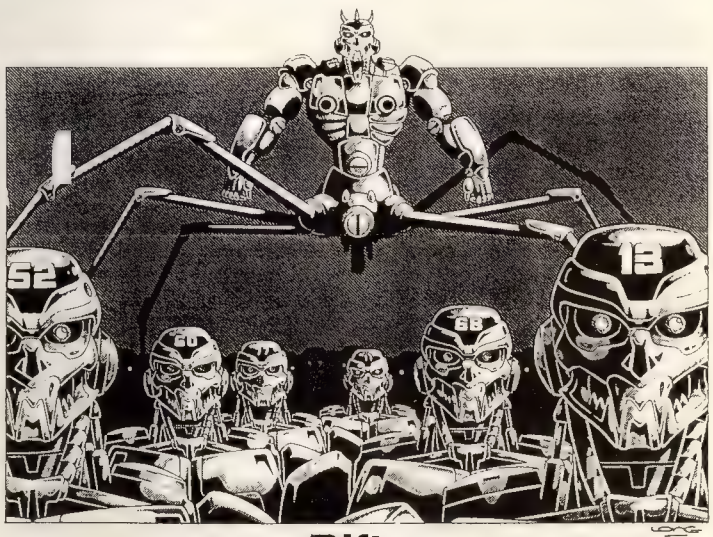
Caliber Press publisher Gary Reed is offering prizes for the following competition question through **Fantazia**:

How many issues of Jim O'Barr's **The Crow** will there be?

All standard competition rules apply. Answers on a postcard or sealed envelope marked "Crow Competition" to the **Fantazia** address by **31st January 1991**, and you may win:

1st Prize: Crow T-Shirt and Portfolio

2nd & 3rd Prize: Either a Crow T-shirt or Portfolio.



Rifts

Rifts is outselling **TMNT and other Strangeness** and continues selling 200 to 400 copies a day, having already reached over 18,000 copies sold! **Rifts** is outselling any other RPG product Palladium has ever made, including **The Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles** at its peak!

Scheduled for late January is the **Rifts Source-Book**, to be followed in late March/early April by **Rifts World Book #1: The Vampire Kingdom**. Three more books, **Rifts World Book: The New West, Rifts World Book: England**, and **Rifts World Book: The Magic Zone** are as yet unscheduled. October 1991 will see **Rifts World Book: Atlantis**. Somewhere in amongst this hectic schedule, we are promised the **Rifts Conversion Book**.

Mutants in Avalon, the new British **TMNT/After the Bomb** supplement written by James Wallis, has been rescheduled to January 4th 1991 thanks to difficulties with the **Robotech** tapes mentioned last issue.

Independency

Blue Comet Press, Abacus, Alchemy and Northeastern Press have just co-released **The Independent Comics Quarterly**, a free eight-page newsletter to promote their titles.

BCP's **Windraven Special #1**, sees the character alongside the other Rough Raiders in a world where they are viewed as criminals. Contributors are D. Marchman, C. A. Stormon, S. Hughes, and M. Byrd.

Zorann: Star Warrior Color Special #1, the first of its kind by BCP, sees a team-up with the Bladesmen. Zac Van Note of Alchemy Press will assist with colour seperations.

Power Stars Annual #1 will see a Lady X story, that should give a new outlook to the series.

Marvel and Eclipse artist Gerald Forton and Tony De Zuniga (**Robo-Cop, Darkman, Conan**) will be contibuting to **The Original Dinosaur Index**.

There is now a limited edition **Bladesmen** badge available.

Raiders of the Lost (D)ark!?

The creative team for the first of several limited series featuring **Indiana Jones** has now been lined up. Multi-award nominated William Messner-Loebs (**Journey, Jonny Quest, Epicurus The Sage**) will script, veteran illustrator Dan Barry who's excellent **Flash Gordon** work has recently been reprinted by Kitchen Sink will do pencilling duties and Karl Kesel (**Hawk & Dove**) will ink. Full colour covers will be painted by Dave Dorman.

This first four-issue series is scheduled for March 1991 release. Dark Horse publisher Mike Richardson commented, "I am very pleased that this particular project is in such able hands since Indiana is such a special character to so many people. After discussions with each of these fine storytellers, I am certain that this creative team has the combined expertise to breathe life into a series that will be remembered for years to come!"

The comic will be in the standard 32-page colour format. There will be few editorial boundaries with regard to the type of stories that can be explored, allowing writers to create a wide variety of stories and situations in which to put the character.

Maintaining the Lucasfilm tradition of secrecy, no specific series title or the plot can be revealed at the time of writing. The Lucasfilm Games version is scheduled for Autumn 1991.

New Titans

The New Titans Sourcebook has been released by Mayfair Games just in time for the **Titans 10th Anniversary Celebration**. The 128-page book, styled in the trade paperback format popularised by the **Batman** rpg, has all the low down on the **Titans** members. It doubles as a reference work, with a complete history of the **New Titans**, and multiple entries for such characters as **Robin/ Nightwing, Kid Flash/Flash,** and **Wonder Girl/Troya**. Many other characters, including villains both old and new are featured. Written by John J. Terra, with cover art by George Perez, co-creator and artist on the **New Titans** comic series, the book will retail for around $10.00.

Tiger Design Gives the Little Guys a Chance!

Tiger Design, better known for its work typesetting magazines and designing corporate identity, is offering its help to publishers of small magazines, fanzines and club newsletter.

Tiger Design is offering to give free, impartial advice on how to make the most, visually, of these types of publications. Tiger is also willing to design and professionally typeset work at well below normal rates to genuine small publishers.

Says Simon Clarke, Tiger Design's Managing Director: "Having been involved in the writing and publishing of several fanzines and small magazines from an early age, I know only too well how difficult it is to produce an interesting, well-written and attractive publication on a shoe-string budget. Now we can help publishers achieve what they want, and hopefully reach a wider audience, without breaking the bank. And with artwork-for-advertising arrangements, they can still produce the magazines on a shoe-string, but the magazines can look a hundred times better!"

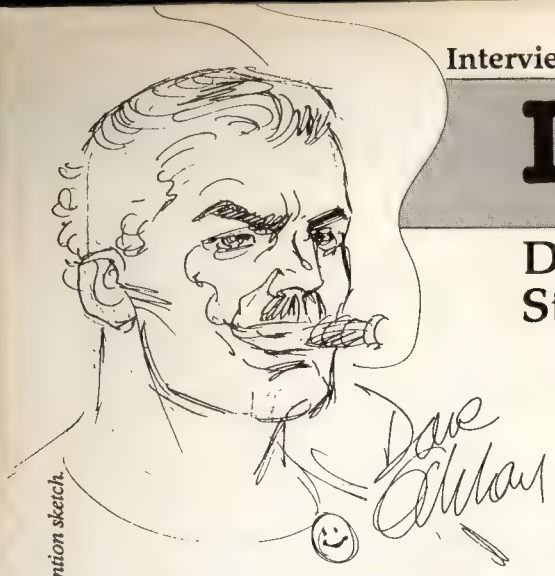
From a science fiction fanzine to a film and video magazine; a pen-pal club leaflet to a martial arts club newsletter, Tiger Design can help.

Simply send the latest issue to Tiger Design, 32 Southampton Gardens, Luton, Beds. LU3 3UA. They will be more than happy to give help and advice - and it won't cost a penny!

Libertine at Large

Dave Gibbons talks about Martha, Frank, Steve, Bruce and Art.

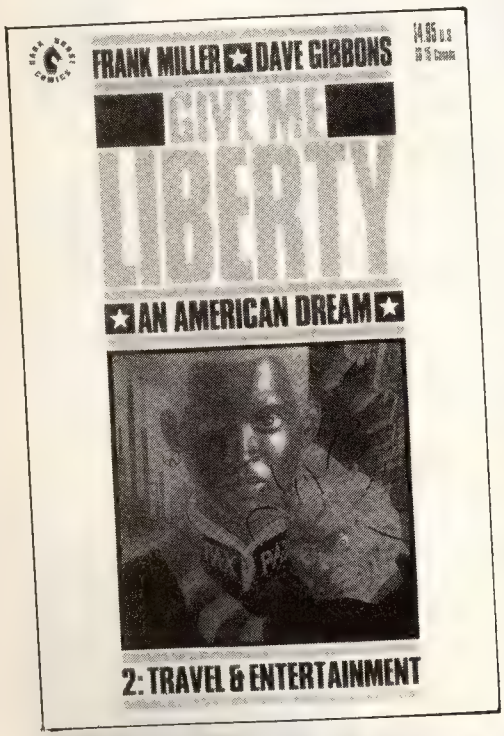
by Alan R Woollcombe



The Comedian TM & © DC Comics Inc; UKCAC'90 Convention sketch.

Give Me Liberty TM & © Frank Miller and Dave Gibbons

Dave Gibbons was very specific over the phone - he only wanted to do an interview after his current spate of projects had hit the newsstands and he had had time to gather his thoughts before the next batch. Several weeks later in a wide-ranging discussion, the man behind *Give Me Liberty* (with Frank Miller), *World's Finest* (with Steve Rude) and *Harvey Kurtzmann's Strange Adventures* (with ...) gave his afterthoughts on his recent collaborations and his varying roles as writer and artist, as well as what makes great comic art. Alan Woollcombe put the questions.



GIVE ME LIBERTY

HAS *Give Me Liberty* turned out as you expected?

It's not got exactly the flavour that Frank [Miller] and I thought it was going to have when we did the first issue. We started off wanting to do A Great American Novel and to approach serious themes in a serious way. After doing quite a lot of it in that frame of mind, we both independently arrived at the conclusion that that wasn't actually the way that we wanted to go. We felt that we were just going to have another high-minded book that took the philosophical and moral high ground and rather preached to people. So we thought we would switch the whole thing around, and we found out that by approaching our fictional world in a slightly flippant manner and by making it a comedy of the absurd, in a way it seems to carry more weight and more conviction than if we had carried on doing it straightforwardly. It scores more points, because it's got much more of the flavour of the real world.

How so?

It's a question of using contradictions - the real world is very contradictory and things run together in unlikely combinations, increasingly so as the webs of communications multiply. All sorts of marriages are being made between ideas and concepts and objects that one would never have foreseen. That has fitted in well with the whole premise of **Liberty**, which has turned out to include a series of such contradictions - for instance, the notion of having the American army packaged in a wonderful new image using the peace symbol, which I find amusing, or other notions along that line like the gay Nazi group, the Aryan Thrust. Basically, **Give Me Liberty** is an adventure story, the adventures of Martha Washington as she makes her pilgrim's progress against the larger backdrop of American politics in a rather peculiar future time.

What about Martha herself?

There's something rather innocent and appealing about the character. Frank and I really got to like her to the extent that, even when this four issue series is finished, there will be more adventures of Martha Washington on an irregular basis - I thought we might call it **Give Me More Liberty** or **Give Me Liberti-er**, in the way of **Die Hard** and **Die Harder**, but it will probably be called something like **The Further Adventures Of Martha Washington In The 21st Century**, which has a nice ring to it... (Chuckles)

What direction would you like to take Martha in?

What we've seen so far are Martha's downbeat and constricting origins and her coming of age. We started with her birth, and as we establish things in the world we are creating, we find out new things about her. Frank in particular has done such a good job of making Martha a living character that, almost in a soap opera way, you want to see what happens when she falls in love or when she's got kids. Martha's America is going to be ripped apart by civil wars and will fragment into self-contained areas like God's Country, Real America, Wonderland, the First Sex Confederation... To see her progress through these various areas and come up against the different facets of American

Give Me Liberty TM & © Frank Miller and Dave Gibbons

society is going to be fun. And just as **Liberty** has expanded from a very gritty, confined beginning into bigger pictures and ever more outlandish adventures, there will be a sense of increasing liberty as Martha's life story unfolds, which I find rather apt.

How have you found working with Frank?

Frank is great to collaborate with, he's a very generous collaborator, and we are having lots of fun. What more can I say? We're in love, we plan to elope... (Laughter) Of course, there have been some problems, the big one being that we're 6000 miles apart. When we started the book, we talked about it in very general terms, but all the actual hands-on work has been done on the telephone and by Federal Express. That slowed things down quite a bit. Also the fact that both he and I had lots of other, more pressing things to do - this was a little project that we got going in our own time.

WORLD'S FINEST

Putting on your writing hat now, how difficult was it to write two such archetypes as Superman and Batman?

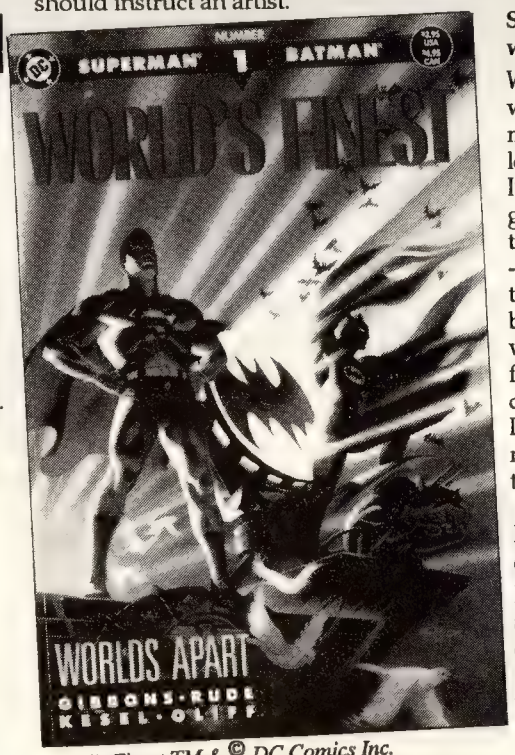
The thing I found very interesting with Superman and Batman was that I could see them in terms of myself and my friends. I tend to be optimistic and hopeful and positive, and in that respect I'm like Superman, whereas several of my good friends are very taciturn, are very within themselves and have a much less optimistic view of the world - like Batman. I found I could write Superman by thinking "What would I say in that situation?" and I could write Batman by thinking what my friends would say in that situation.

Any chance of a follow-up?

I was offered the opportunity to write **World's Finest II** - now, there's a novel idea... (Chuckles) - but having had my say about Superman and Batman once, I don't feel there's much I can add. What I did with **World's Finest**, which was sort of my brief and what I wanted to get straight anyway, was to set out their relationship, to see Superman in terms of Batman, and Batman in terms of Superman. There are obviously innumerable ideas you can spin off, but I think once it's been done, there's no point in doing it any more. It is conceivable I might have an idea in the future for a great story with Superman and Batman, and I wouldn't rule anything out, but it certainly isn't my intention to do **World's Finest II** at the moment.

Has the experience of writing changed your attitude to drawing at all?

It's very interesting to be on the other side. It has made a difference to my approach to drawing, because I've become aware of what is actually essential in a picture. When you're writing a description of a picture, it does focus your mind wonderfully as to what are the essentials and what you're trying to do. It also shows you the degree to which you should instruct an artist.



World's Finest TM & © DC Comics Inc.

Do you work from a full script with Frank?

Yes, I much prefer to work that way. Functionally speaking, Frank writes it and I draw it, although it's been quite an organic process - his scripts are extremely terse and open to interpretation. I'll get the script, do thumbnail [sketches] of it all and bounce it back to Frank, and we'll talk about my thumbnails. Only then do I draw it. But even at that point we will swap things around, add pages and take them out - **Liberty** has gone through so many changes that it didn't actually become what it is until the final artwork was done. In some ways I found it worrying because I generally like to have a map of where I'm going, but it has worked out - Frank has got a great facility for thinking on his feet and coming up with the perfect bridge between sequences and the perfect spin to put on things in a very economical way.

Did Steve Rude [artist on *World's Finest*] have a problem with your descriptions that you were aware of?

There were a couple of times when Steve had to get me to read out slowly exactly what I'd written - they were perfectly clearly written, but Steve was a little overwhelmed by the detail in some of it! (Chuckles) Again, one realizes the sort of leeway that you have to give an artist - I couldn't imagine anybody making a better job of it than Steve, but there were things that Steve didn't illustrate that were very dear to me and that I regret he didn't illustrate, but on the other hand there were things that he did put in that I never imagined but which actually pleased me very much. What it has taught me about scripting is to make myself fireproof, so that even if the artist doesn't draw anything like what I've asked for, the story will still make sense. For me, it's always the story which is uppermost.

So how does writing comics compare with drawing them?

Writing is purely an intellectual exercise, whereas drawing is to some extent a manual exercise, a craft. It's strange: looking back at **World's Finest**, although I'm aware of shortcomings in it, I'm generally very happy with it. I don't have the same feeling that I have with drawing - I'm embarrassed by my shortcomings in the craft of drawing, I'm not embarrassed by what I'm intellectually trying to do with drawing. With writing I find that, for the additional reason that I'm in control and I'm not being told what to do, I feel very proud of what I've written and much more at one with what I've written than with a lot of things I've drawn.

Has that attitude fed back at all into your drawing?

It has changed my approach to drawing, and I now feel much better about my drawing. It's now clear to me, after having written and after having drawn, why it is that, almost without exception, comic art only reaches its highest

World's Finest TM & © DC Comics Inc.

YES
I HAVE
UH, WELL... SHOULD UH BRING BACK SOME MEMORIES, ANYWAY.
HAS ALREADY
YOU KNOW, YOU'D BE WELCOME TO SPEND THE HOLIDAYS AT WAYNE MANOR, E--
OH, FRIENDS N METROPOLIS, I MEAN...
WELL, ANYWAY, HAPPY HOLIDAYS, BRUCE
CRIME NEVER TAKES A HOLIDAY, CLARK.
THANKS, BUT I'LL BE SPENDING CHRISTMAS WITH FRIENDS.
I DON'T CARE IF IT IS CHRISTMAS DAY, COSTELLO, THERE ARE URGENT ACCOUNTS TO SETTLE--
YOU'LL BE IN MY OFFICE AT NINE-- SHARP!
SI-YI-LENT NI-YIGHT..
DAMN IT, DRIVER-- HAVE YOU GOT THE RADIO ON?
NO, SIR, MR LUTHOR
HO-O-LY NI-YIGHT
THINK IT'S COMING FROM THE TRUNK.
IS BEEN FORCED SIR
SOMEONE'S IN--
METROPOLIS ALREADY, RUDOLPH? HO HO HO!
AARGH!
JOKER?
THAT'S ME-- A FESTIVE CARD THAT WISHES YOU A HAPPY CHRISTMAS! HO HO HA HA!
THOUGHT I'D SPEND THE HOLIDAYS IN METROPOLIS! SAAAY... WHY DON'T WE GET TOGETHER, LEX?
WE COULD TALK ABOUT OLD TIMES-- BOTH OF THEM! HA HA HA!
NOT VERY WELCOMING, LEX-- BESIDES DON'T YOU REMEMBER...?
WE MADE A DEAL. MY METROPOLIS VACATION STILL HAS A WEEK TO RUN...
MR. LUTHOR I DON'T THINK YOU SHOULD--
TALK? ONE MORE WORD AND I'LL..

potential when it's done by one person, when it's the same hand that writes and draws. That's when it actually becomes a total expression. There's a lot of confusion when talking about comic art: when people say someone's a really good comic artist, what they mean is comic illustrator. It is the combination which is the work of art, not the pictures and not the words, but how they meet. To me, somebody like Will Eisner, Frank Miller or Hal Foster is a great comic artist - even though there might be draughtsmen in comics who are better draughtsmen or writers in comics who write better, they're still not better comic artists because the art of the comic is in that dual expression of words and pictures.

Does that mean that, for you, great comics can only be created by artist/writers working alone?

Although it can be done collaboratively, it's like lightning striking, it's so rare. Sometimes, in a collaboration like the one between Frank [Miller] and David Mazzuchelli on **Batman: Year One**, you can reach an indivisible point - people whose work is so in sympathy that it looks like the creation of one man - but it relies on a lot of empathy between the two collaborators. Most comics aren't done like that: most comics are written and presented as a fait accompli to somebody who is geographically very distant.

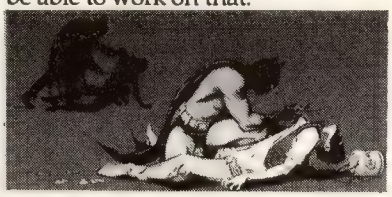
THE FUTURE

Now that you have been accepted as a writer as well as a draughtsman, what comes next?

Well, having learnt to draw to a certain level and now that I'm finding out hopefully how to write to a certain level, I have this yearning to write and draw my own stuff. My approach to comics has always been, from when I was a kid, to tell stories in pictures - I've never been interested in drawing just for its own sake, I always wanted to be able just to draw well enough to be able to tell the story. I have got a project in mind at the moment, but it is so nebulous that I don't really want to discuss it. I would like to try and break some new ground, both in the way that it's published and what the content of it is. There are some very interesting things on both sides of the Atlantic, routes whereby work can be published other than by the Big Two, all of which I'm considering.

Is there anything definite you can tell us is coming up in 1991?

What I find is nice is to intermingle Big Projects and smaller things. I'm writing an atypical **Superman** story for DC, to be illustrated by Simon Bisley. I'm also going to be writing and drawing a Ray Bradbury story for a book called **The Ray Bradbury Chronicles** from Byron Preiss Publications. Then I'm also probably going to be doing something for **A1**, which is going to be published by Epic - I've got a rather more autobiographical thing in mind for that. There's another piece of work featuring two very popular characters, which I'll also have to be coy about. Finally, by the latter part of next year I hope to have developed the project that I want to write and draw myself and be able to work on that.



Comics Reviews

By Paul H. Birch & Sheldon Bayley

The What The?! X-Mas Special #10

Marvel: £0.60

The What The?!is a witty anthology of strips that parody various Marvel characters - Chaplain America for example. Four strips in all; including the Chaplain himself and his battle against his sales, which he solves by getting his sidekick 'Bunky' killed! (A la 'Death in the Family'). Another of the strips 'Milk and Cookies' is more intriguing than amusing - but first prize has to go to the festive lead strip 'I'll be Doom for Christmas', where Doctor Doom fills in for Santa Claus one Christmas Eve. Truly funny - this strip is all written in rhyming couplets and John Byrne pulls off some wonderful reindeer caricatures. Well worth a place on your X-Mas shopping list!

Paul's Choice of the Month

Marshal Law - Kingdom of the Blind

Apocalypse: £2.99

Theoretically this review should be placed in the book section, but I've never been particularly happy with the idea that over 48 pages constitutes a graphic novel.

After subdued hype we are presented with Apocalypse's first outing. A likely hit since it's that notorious hero-hater, Marshal Law. In this, the self-contained 'Kingdom of the Blind', he confronts the Private Eye - An obvious cipher for Bruce Wayne's true ego.

All those fannish comments, the closeted homosexual bad jokes, and paranoid character driven thoughts are brought to a head here. Yes, we've all discussed them until we are blue in the face, but perhaps it's taken a man like Mr. Mills, a British writer unsteeped in the Lore; able to defuse the archetype from the mythological, and raise a Roger Moore like eyebrow and say 'Oh really, is that what it's all about, ho, hum' to clarify those opinions. He appears like a stranger on an even stranger shore, dipping his feet into tepid water, and although finding it displeasing, more bemused by the sewage bobbing up and down about his ankles. In this could he loosely be seen as akin to the Marshal himself?

I don't want to go into the storyline too much, suffice to say the Private Eye leaves Marshal Law with somewhat of a dilemma. The Private Eye uses this to his advantage, as Marshal Law allows his feelings to be temporarily shown for a brief section of the title, and in a certain fashion, a mirror image is explored. Lest you think this is altogether too serious an academic storyline, fear not, for there are jokes a plenty, and commonly of a cruel variety.

O'Neill's artwork is most invigorating, strangely cinematic in approach, with the colour enhancing each page. His figurework is changing, it's not something I can put a fixture on, but it's subtlely different, put it down to an ever evolving artist perhaps.

A downer on this title would be the production of the covers, which tend to smear even in this cold weather, something I'm aware Apocalypse are rectifying.

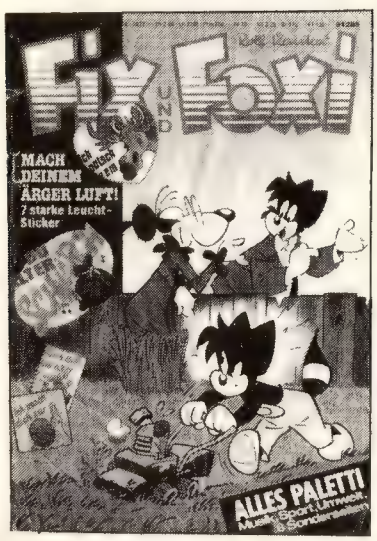
I pondered upon, how long this title can remain as provocative as it has been, without turning into a parody of itself, but conclude with the belief that the natural anti-authoritarian bent of British creators, and these two in particular, will serve its cause, and die a natural death when they believe it time - Let's hope that's not too soon.

Wonder Woman #50

DC Comics: £0.80

Wherein Hippolyte and the Amazons return to Man's world. Perez works his characters well in this script, expressing their fears and doubts, hopes and fantasies in a fitting manner. In some ways this could be seen in comparison to real countries gaining independence, or joining the U.N. Perhaps, even more so, from an American perspective, as we see the reactions of man's world; we can take it as their acception of the U.S.S.R. in the changing face of the coming new century.

Jill Thompson evokes images of the Minoan period in her art that add to the feel of the piece. The final pages are a portrait gallery of Wonder Woman, the best being Bolland's 'hubba-hubba' version and the crazy Sergio Aragones' interpretation.



Rolf Kanka's Fix and Foxi #43

DM: £2.60

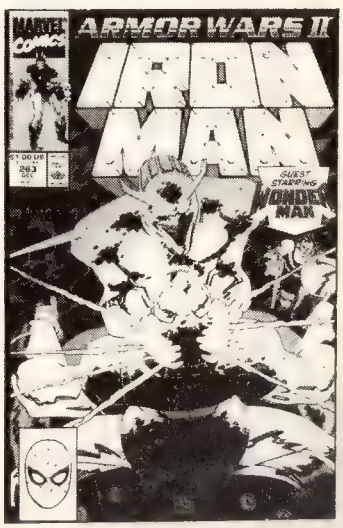
A Swiss children's anthropomorphic comic written in German. My favourite of the three strips being a visit to Sea-World by Fix, Foxi and Lupo. The artwork is lively and imaginative and easy to follow without understanding the language.

Iron Man #263

Marvel: £0.60

Iron Man battles the Living Laser while The Mandarin tries to control Tony Stark's body from afar. John Romita Jr. turns in some great Walt Simonson-style pencils.

WonderMan later enters the fray to aid Shell-head, and the second set of Armour Wars grind on.



Comics Reviews

Buried Treasure #2
Caliber: $2.50

Curiously this begins with the Captain Science strip I reviewed for AC's **Barbarians and Beauties #1**, but has a different Orlando/Wood cover that shows where Rand Holmes got a lot of his influences from.

There's a wacky strip called 'Fatal Suicide' by genius Jack Cole, that trundles along in almost Marx Brothers fashion, with an art style you're now only likely to see on Kia-ora drink TV ad's - Sound good?

Joe Kubert demonstrates imaginative use of page design in a jungle adventure, where an explorer searches for treasure, only to get his just rewards when he returns to America.

So you thought you'd seen all Jack Kirby has to offer? He did some spoof work when he was with Joe Simon, on series like Fighting American and Boy Commanders - Now see another side as the team are represented by 'Lockjaw the Alligator', the jokes are old hat now, though there's a reference to **Pogo** (which is remarkable in that one didn't really aknowledge other creators in days of yesteryear). What's nice to see is Simon and Kirby doing a completely cartooned style, the dynamics are still there, but you get to see the subtleties in the art more readily as well. Not really the time or enough space to bring up the old Kirby vs. Lee who created what for Marvel here, but the title of this does beckon a question or two about a certain Inhuman dog...

The mag finishes with a Frank Frazetta single page on drug awareness - and you thought it all happened with acid parties!

Caliber and all the other publishers reprinting these old pieces, at prices we can manage to afford are to be applauded whole-heartedly!

Black Phantom #3
Americomics: $2.75

So here we are, the comic that features the Mark Heike cover so many of you are phoning our offices about, asking where you can get it after seeing the ad' in Fantazia - Well don't ring me I'm a very busy person, go to a comic shop and ask them!

The Black Phantom is set in the wild west of yesteryear. The lady wears a black hat so you know which side she was on, except this issue she becomes one of the good guys, or more aptly, girls. You'll note the poor lady had obviously been on the run from the law for so long that she couldn't get new buttons for her blouse, and when she changed sides, became too busy to bother with minor details like sewing.

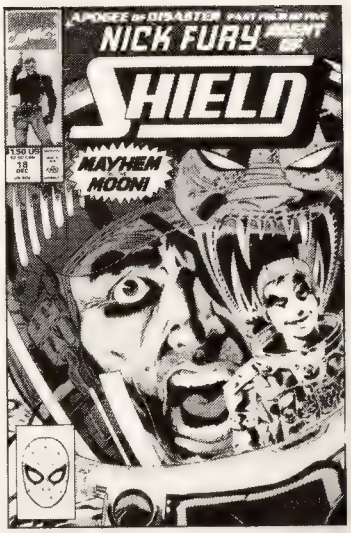
There are two Frank Bolle reprints which show a good use of page design, and as I thought only Kirby was doing back then, taking the figures outside the panel boxes. The scripts actually have clever twists in their plots for how short they are.

The new strip by the AC team has the Phantom with a few extra inches round her chest, but it's more bumps than grind. The story relates how the western hero, Redmask causes Phantom to change her ways, or at least some of them, as his mask doesn't cover the rest of his face also going red!

Cloak and Dagger #15
Marvel: £0.60

A nice surprise! Wonderful artwork by Rick Leonardi and Al Williamson, a great story from Steve Gerber, and some glorious printing and colours from Marvel! Cloak and Dagger are more in a long line of Marvel mutants, and as their names suggest represent the different sides of light and darkness with their powers. However, Cloak finds out he doesn't know all there is to know about his latent abilities, whilst the duo together have to deal with fanatical Aryan activists.

A really solid 'superhero' title that proves that a good standard of quality can be reached in the mass-produced titles.



Nick Fury, Agent of Shield #18
Marvel: £0.60

In the penultimate part of the 'Apogee of Disaster' saga, Nick Fury plays Dan Dare, as he and his other Shield Agents face a half creature/half robot monstrosity which is after their blood. The end of the comic sets the scene for the final confrontation as Nick valiantly stands alone against the creature and its army to buy time for his colleagues to escape.

Writer D. G. Chichester nicely characterises Nick Fury, with plenty of appropriate colloquialism, and also toys with a romantic sub-plot which runs through the title.

The highlight though, must be Herb Trimpe's pencils, one of my old favourites - It's nice to see him still strutting his stuff in the world of comics.

The Mechanoids #1
Caliber Press: $2.50

Based on a R.P.G. this mini-series takes place 200 years after the last Mechanoid had been seen. As you may have guessed the cybernetic haters of human derived life forms have returned, albeit only one of them - But they are ably to multiply/breed their race quite drastically in numbers. This issue is basically a set-up for the events to come. The human empathic link-up with a comatose mechanoid may lead to an interesting sub-plot. The art uses a variety of angles, but figure work needs strengthening in places.

The second half of the comic is a text feature by Palladium Books publisher, Kevin Siembieda, on the R.P.G. game and a well written piece on role-playing itself - That explains all for the non-cognizant.

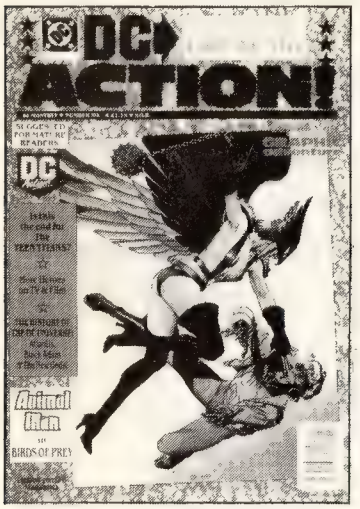
Zorann: Star Warrior #1
Blue Comet Press: $2.00

A sword and sorcery with a bit of a difference. The main plot concerns Zorann rescuing Relonda, keeper of the soulstone of Rynald, from the clutches of the Raggalion Demon-Man. Barras and Stormon deliver some fine well paced art, that has an attractive look not unsimilar to the work of Rudy Nerbes.

What makes this different from the typical barbarian warrior comics one can often get plagued with is, Zorann's relationship to Relonda and her son, Ty. Zorann is a hero, but his acts of machoism are often shy bravado metered by the

Comics Reviews

seemingly more worldly-wise Relonda. The nearest comparison I can make is Howie Post's **Anthro** series for DC in the 60's.



DC Action #6

London Editions Magazines: £1.75

The 'Animal Man' story by Grant Morrison further develops the idea of Thanagarian culture (Hawkmen) set up by Moore in **Swamp Thing**, and what does one say to fractal geometry! Comic touches begin and conclude the piece, that's dramatic main section sees a Thanagarian artist in tortured angst.

The mag serialises 'History of the DC Universe' the text and collage-like images achieving a more eye-beholding nature due to this larger printing size.

An amusing UKCAC'90 report by Martin Gray leads into the concluding section, which features the Teen Titans as they go up against Trigon in the first of their epics. It's action and tension all the way, but judging from the letter columns, regular readers feel it's rather dated. Such a shame; I still think it works.

The Boston Bombers #1

Caliber Press: $2.50

Welcome to a world where the Catholic church has its mortal representative as a Madonna rather than a pope, and somewhere in Africa plots are afoot to overthrow the Church power and build a world Empire.

Into this scenario are brought the Boston Bombers, a group of female James Bond types, led by a woman christened Indra.

The comic dances between good girl art and spy thriller action. It's difficult to gauge what public reaction to this will be, but there appear to be enough plot and character ideas around for it to develop into an intricate work.

Lucifer #'s 1 - 3

Trident: £1.10

A cheerful jeu d'esprit by Eddie Campbell and Phil Elliot, this is literally "a tale told by an idiot, full of sound and fury, signifying nothing". An all too mundane Lucifer penetrates an underworld filled with up to date tortures - my favourite being a bar haunted by the shades of those who never got their round in during life - deposes Satan and brings Hell to the streets of London. Unfortunately, the citizenry is unimpressed - well, wouldn't you be if Hell turned out to be a giant carbuncle?

There's not a lot of substance or point to this, just a lot of laughs. Good grief, it's a comical comic! That alone is enough to make it worth investigating - and when the humour is of the wry, intellectual kind generally purveyed by Eddie Campbell, it is, for me at least, a must. Phil Elliot draws it well, in his usual cool and unspectacular style, allowing the reader to savour the insipid malice of Lucifer and enjoy the bland smiles of the public as they prove totally incapable of distinguishing the Day of Judgement from just another publicity stunt. Come to think of it, is there any difference?

Somehow this looks like a classic by-product of the Monty Python generation - that strand of English humour which views everyday reality from a noticably bent perspective. In this case, it's Dante filtered through daytime television, and I love it. Harrier's New Wave line (for which this was originally destined) used to produce a lot of this sort of material, and I've missed it sorely of late. Definitely one to treasure.

Review by Mike Kidson

Sheldon's Choice of the Month

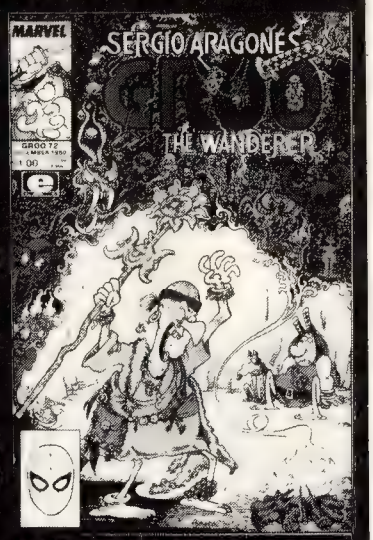
Groo the Wanderer #72

Marvel/Epic: £0.60

Sergio Aragones and his spoof barbarian - Groo, are still going strong, unleashing an often unusual but never boring brand of humour on unaware readers.

This issue Groo meets a Shaman - from which the title of this story is taken. Groo becomes the hero of a village for a while by a series of totally unintentional good deeds.

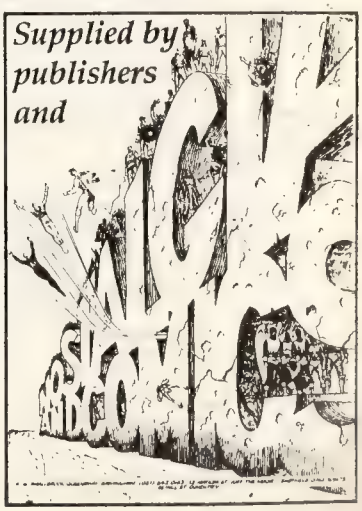
A light and amusing read with some wonderful caricaturing by Aragones. The use of the dog as an intelligent counterfoil to the less-than-intelligent Groo is a master-stroke, and provides some of the funniest moments



in the comic - Perfect Christmas reading material. Get it!

In Brief...

AC Comics: FemForce #28 &29: *Fun stuff as heroes galore enter stage left and right for a battle royale..* **Blue Comet Press:** The Bladesmen #2: *Good Elfquestish back-up strip.* **Caliber Press:** Ashes #3: *A title that will get nominated for many worthy awards!* Billy Nguyen Private Eye: *Chaykinesque but often misses the mark.* Buried Treasure #3: *Even better than previous.* Caliber Presents #15: *Worth looking at for the J. O'Barr work.* Camelot Eternal: *A what if Arthur lived series, could have possibilities.* Day Brothers Present: *Excellent art, average stories.* Django & Angel #2 &3: *Caliber's Achilles Heel.* Grafik Muzik #1: *So familiar and yet so different. One to keep a careful eye upon.* Jazz Age Chronicles #4: *Don't let the cartoony art style fool you - it's a great adventurous yarn.* **DC:** Animal Man #28: *Animal Man goes mad and starts eating horses! Gorgeous Bolland cover.* Detective Comics #624: *Batman catches the murderer who's been using his name. Another jam art issue and a Dick Sprang cover.* Dr. Fate #21: *Kent and Inza Nelson are found in Dr. Fate's amulet. Fate versus anti-Fate. Joe Staton doing Keith Giffen art..* Ms. Tree Quarterly #2: *Ms. Tree installment hopefully educates that not everyone with long hair should be locked away to rot!* Robin #1: *Highlights are a Bolland cover and a Neal Adams poster.* Sandman #21: *The Endless have a family reunion in "Season of Mists O". Gaiman and Dringenberg together again - Bang!* **Fleetway:** Crisis #54: *Seconds before deadline but I have to get this in; Paul Grist is one of the most versatile artists working in comics today.* Revolver #5: *Fleetway's colourful anthology: Purple Days strip highly recommended. Rian Hughes' art on Dan Dare stands out..* **Fleetway/Quality:** Nemesis #11: *Talbot's art and Potter's lettering often lack clarity in this reduced size.* **King Hell Press:** Brat Pack #1: *Metaphors, symbolism and even parody are displayed in Veitch's superhero sidekick team with a rock 'n' roll edge.* **London Editions:** Batman #28: *Pleasant moody text story.* Batman #29: *Entertaining article on Batman's least wanted rogues gallery included.* Batman Presents: *Kitson proves to be a practical thinking artist, as Batgirl doesn't wear high heels!* Superman #46: *Extra long JL story, as it hits the fan with them meeting Suicide Squad.* Zones #4: *The debut of Swampy's wife! One of the top Brit' comics!* **Marvel:** Conan the Barbarian #239: *Is the Cimmerian warrior dead? Very '70s in feel.* The New Warriors #6: *An updated version of The Defenders. Also stars The Inhumans.* Zorro #2: *As kitschy as the TV series it's taken from. Zorro vs. The Magician.* **Marvel Epic:** Stalkers #10: *Well crafted near future psi-cop stories.* **Nightfall Press:** Nightfall #2: *Mixture of text and comic stories with Kirby influenced work by David Stephenson.* **Savoy Books:** Hardcore Horror #4: *Only offensive if you've preconditioned yourself to mainstream tendencies.* **Tristar:** The Xmas Damage: *Irreverance runs amok, best bits by Emerson and Erasmus.*



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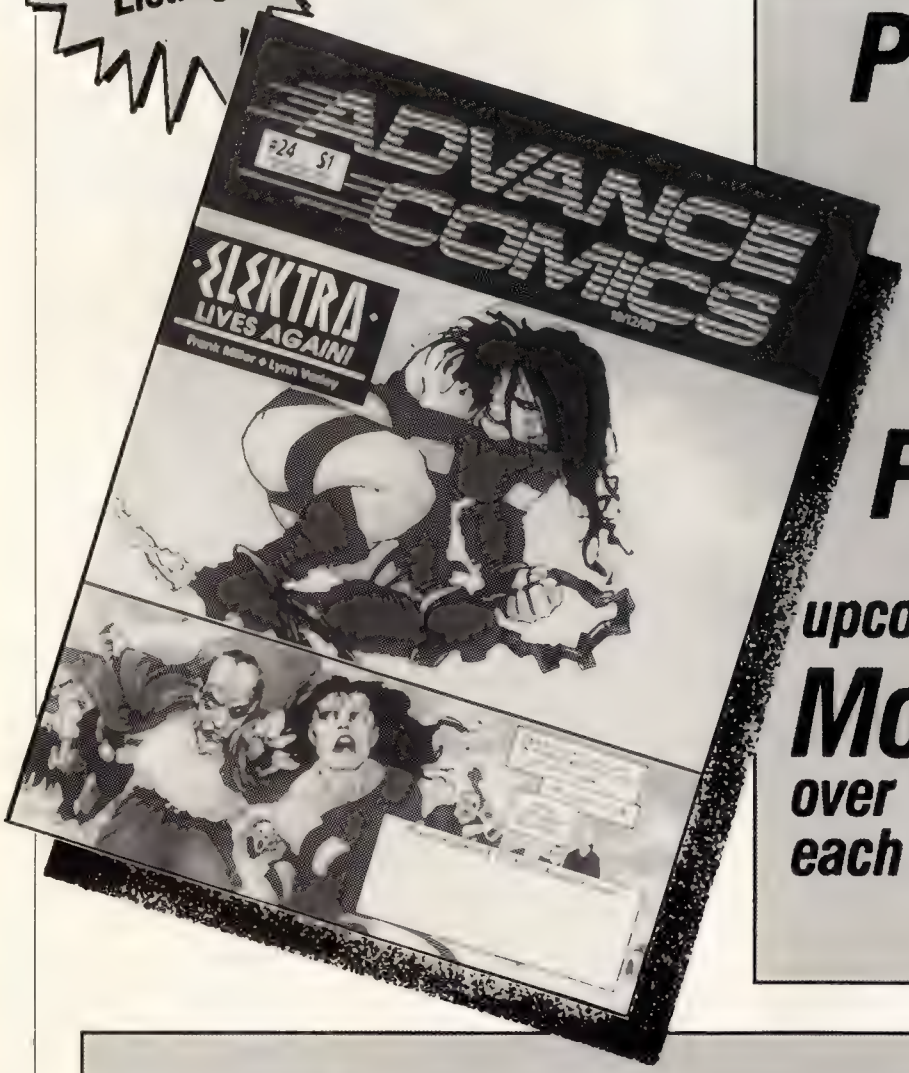

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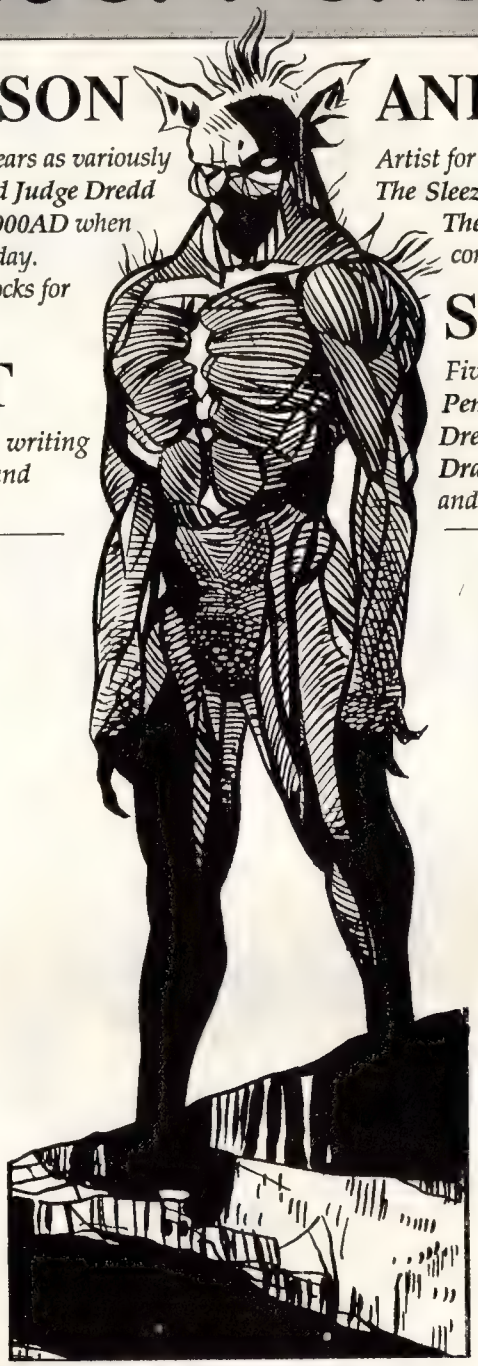
Knights of Pendragon

JOHN TOMLINSON

Worked at Marvel UK for four and a half years as variously editor, designer and paste-up artist. Edited ***Judge Dredd Annuals, Judge Dredd Year Book,*** *and* ***2000AD*** *when Messrs. Burton and McKenzie are on holiday. Written Armoured Gideon and Future Shocks for* ***2000AD.*** *Co-writer on* ***Pendragon.***

DAN ABNETT

Three and a half years editor at Marvel UK, writing for most titles. Co-writer, on ***Pendragon*** *and* ***The Punisher.***



ANDY LANNING

Artist for ***Look-In, Ghostbusters, Galaxy Rangers, The Sleeze Brothers*** *(co-creator). Co-writing* ***The Punisher, Dreadlands.*** *Created children's comic,* ***Wym.*** *Inker on* ***Pendragon*** *etc...*

STEVE WHITE

Five years editor Marvel UK including ***Pendragon.*** *Written* ***G. I. Joe,*** *co-writing* ***Dreadlands.*** *Colouring for Sleeze Bros.,* ***Dragon's Claws, RoboCop, Punisher*** *comic and No Escape graphic novel.*

HOW did The Knights of Pendragon come about, was it that you wanted to utilise characters from the Marvel Universe, an ecological concern or both?

S.W: It basically just came out of a conversation between me and Jenny.

J.T: The time just seemed right to do a 'Green' title - At the time we had no notions about tying it in with **Excalibur** and the other American comics -

D.A: I think it's fair to say it was two separate ideas that became one - a desire to use Captain Britain in a comic, and a desire to do a green comic and somewhere along the line these two joined -

J.T: Dan had the idea for tying it in with the Green Knight mythos.

S.W: No, actually it was Jenny's idea. She wanted to use the green man, the mythological creature, and then Dan as he was approached to write it, said what about the Green Knight. I said brilliant!

Then as it came about, John got involved with the writing, the two of them got together and it evolved that way really.

The first six issues as such, are a book or collection, what did you attempt to achieve with that particular story?
(There's a pause, then laughter)

J.T: Start with the easy questions first, eh? (Laughter) Well, what we wanted was a good story, well told - I think that's the best you can hope for, really. Something that could be read as an adventure story first and foremost, but which also had deeper levels, the main one being the Green aspect.

D.A: or if you're into horror, or supernatural or even if you're into superheroes that are treated with a degree of realism. We mainly had a main character who at that stage had not become Dai Thomas, he did everything that was going to happen in the storyline, and with the suggestion of using the Captain Britain continuity, it became obvious that Dai Thomas would be the one things would be centred around, so we latched naturally onto that.

The comic is printed on Scangloss - How in the Marvel UK offices do you attempt to be environmentally friendly?

S.W: I say, not very much gets done as a whole. I think a lot of us are involved in some way, but I think Marvel as a company could do a lot more. The chemicals we use for our darkroom, we try to find ecologically sound ways of disposing of them, other than flushing them down the sink and straight into the Thames.

D.A: That was quite ironic. We tended to clean out our machines and throw them down the sink, but we realised this was just not doing the river and sewer systems any good at all. For a price we get a company to take it away - And they pour them down the sink! The only service we were paying for was for them to take them off the premises!

S.W: It's not as easy to be green as one would like - We now get our pay cheques on recycled paper - laundered money (Laughter)

A.L: You're drinking the chemicals now aren't you?

S.W: Yes (Laughs)

A.L: I am the inker (Laughter)

J.T: You've said your piece, you can go home now.

Each issue starts with two quotes on the splash page - Does each writer prepare one?

J.T: I think whoever's writing that issue figures out what quotes are going to be used. Originally there was to be one per issue, but we came up with loads that we really wanted to use.

D.A: On an actual work practise basis, the three of us (Steve, Dan and John) sit down each issue and hammer out the plot to a fair degree. Then John and I go away taking it in turns to write each particular issue. Then the one who hasn't had the mechanical process of typing up that issue will do whatever revision is deemed necessary.

S.W: John actually wrote the first issue, Dan the second, John third, so Dan does the even numbers and John the odd...

J.T: Hopefully people can't tell the difference.

D.A: I think the synthesis of the idea gets blended together.

S.W: We've actually noticed that John or Dan write certain better characters. John writes better Kate stories and Dan better Dai characters or one of the new characters for the next six, a guy called Hunter, which is very much his character.

J.T: It's great writing Kate, because I try to write her as a 'real' woman. Women I've written about in comics before have tended to be rather cliched and one-dimensional, but with Kate I'm trying to write her like women I've known (Laughs), things they might have said, or done.

S.W: #7 has got a high sex content.

Artwork TM & © Marvel Entertainment Group; Pendragon #9

Knights of Pendragon

J.T: #7 I blame Jenny O'Connor for! She suggested that if **Pendragon** continued, she wanted sex in it. I thought, it couldn't be Kate, because she doesn't get her big love scene for a few issues yet. So it had to be Grace, and she's not your average lights-out, missionary position woman at all. It had to be reasonably kinky, but I had the horrible realisation as I was typing that I was straying into five-knuckle shuffle territory. I wrote a note in the script for Gary to tone the scene down a bit - and Gary immediately drew Grace looking like a walking Ann Summers catalogue. Her flat was a torture chamber, basically. So there it is - much as I'd like to wax sanctimonious about sex in comics, I can't because I've been rumbled. I'm just a dreadful old pervert.

Was using Captain Britain a commercial consideration?

D.A: It was commercial because the comic would sell better with Captain Britain in it, he's a popular character, but that is not to say 'Why shouldn't we do a comic with Captain Britain in it because he's a perfectly decent character'.

J.T: He's also an integral part of the story. The more we started thinking about Cap. Britain's part of the continuity, the more we realised we probably couldn't do it without him - And if we did we'd have had to come up with some hugely powerful superhero to do the first issue.

S.W: Yeah, unfortunately that was what had happened with the first issue - When the decision was made to put Cap. Britain in it.

D.A: Not to have him in the whole story, but to have him guest starring later on in the sequence - And the first response was: he's got to appear in #1 if you're going to have him in this book at all, and we had to engineer a cat-flap for him.

S.W: He appears in a bit of a throwaway manner.

J.T: If we'd had a bit more time, we'd have written it differently. He basically just shows up on Dai's doorstep, says 'Hello, I'm Brian' and doesn't do very much.

We were talking over lunch about the sales being pretty good in America.

J.T: About 2/3 - A lot of that is probably accounted for by **Excalibur**, but also that kind of comic for some reason seems to go down much better in America.

D.A: You're dealing with a larger audience, potentially anyway, so decent sales will let you more in the States, just because there are more punters.

S.W: One of the things that's come out recently was the thing that a lot of people said 'We were disappointed by the lack of Captain Britain but the story was strong enough to hold our attention'.

What's the reception been like on British newsstands to an American sized comic?

D.A: It's very difficult to display in the way that British newsstands are used to a bigger size, in the same way our British sized magazines don't go down terribly well in America.

S.W: Apparently it's because they don't fit into comic bags in the States.

D.A: You're talking about a huge industry making comic bags, that's obviously quite decisive. I think we'll probably see more US sized comics on the newsstands, **The Complete Spider-Man** that's being put out by Marvel UK, Smith's and everybody are apparently very happy with that - It's almost like a digest book rather than a limp sort of comic that will get lost behind **Radio Times.**

S.W: The thing with US sized comics is, they don't know where to put them.

With **Pendragon** I don't think they had any idea - I've seen it on the top with **Deadline** and **Strip.**

A.L: They tend to lump us all together. Go in another part of Smith's and you'll see it in with **My Little Pony.**

S.W: We're actually hoping to talk to Smith's fairly soon so we can ask their opinions.

Who actually are The Knights of Pendragon, and Pendragon in particular?
(General Laughter)

J.T: They'll have read #6 by the time this is out. The Pendragon is a kind of amorphous concept rather than anyone or thing in particular - It's an elemental power bestowed -

D.A: ..On whoever happens to need it. King Pendragon is the derivation of the word given to the chief warrior in times of need who'll bring all the tribes together to fight back at whatever foes are besetting them.

The idea we've taken is a superhuman force is given to various individuals when there is a duty for them to perform.

J.T: This is what has happened to Dai Thomas in the first six issues, but from seven onwards more people become possessed by the Pendragon -

D.A: Yes, Knights rather than Knight. There's only one Knight of Pendragon in the first six and that's Dai himself. An underlying concept of that is that each champion Pendragon spirit that is there to be bestowed upon individuals has itself been bestowed to other people in the past, and with it carries whatever traces of whatever it is, in Dai's it's quite obvious it's Gawaine's.

S.W: And that's why Captain Britain picks up the Lancelot traits between #5 and 6.

J.T: Yes, the Lancelot idea was something we had to tone down a little bit as the Americans weren't particularly happy with the idea of introducing something so major. We weren't allowed to turn Captain Britain into Lancelot, we could only hint at it.

A.L: Isn't the Pendragon also related to the earth?

D.A: Yes, that's the other thing which will happen as the next series progresses. So far we've got an individual who gets the champion spirit because he has to go out and perform a duty and this particular duty is to re-establish contact with the primal forces of nature. As #7 begins to get rolling we discover there is actually an antithesis to that.

J.T: A counter-balancing force that we call 'The Bane'.

D.A: Which is the anti-Pendragons, the ones who are sent out specifically to stop the champions. There is a more direct antagonism across groups of people rather than just an individual with a single-minded quest.

Will the relationship between Dai and Kate develop?

J.T: Probably not. We'd hoped it was going to, but again, we had similar problems with Dai as we had with Cap. Britain in that the Americans, and in

Artwork TM & © Marvel Entertainment Group; Pendragon #9

Artwork TM & © Marvel Entertainment Group; Pendragon #6

particular Chris Claremont wanted to continue using the characters. So we couldn't do anything too radical with Dai. We could do what we liked with Kate. We could use Dai, but only as long as he was in his original condition at the end of the series.

S.W: He'd had such a major crack at the whip, that to do anything more would have been redundant. He'd done his bit. Anyway, I think the potential relationship will be taken up by one new character and we've also got Union Jack in it now, he's going to become the central character. He is going to become a Pendragon.

D.A: He moves up a notch from the Caped Crusader-type, gifted man to the Cap. Britain sort of levels of power.

J.T: Which meant we could get rid of the silly WWII gun he used to carry in his holster. He's actually strong enough that he doesn't need it anymore. We also updated his costume slightly although he's still recognisable.

We discovered after we'd written all this there's about three or four different ideas floating around for Union Jack mini-series, and we were lucky to get in there first. Whether or not we've been able to do justice to him I don't know. We're certainly going to be using him a bit more.

This is Gary Erskine's first professional comic job?

D.A: Technically, he first did an eight-page strip for the third issue of **Strip**. I mainly gave that to him while he was waiting to start **Pendragon**. We'd already latched onto him as a potential...

J.T: He'd actually sent in some really very good Dredd samples to **2000AD** which for some reason nobody picked up on. He sent the same stuff and other samples into Marvel.

A.L: Andy Lanning, inker (Laughter) We were up in Glasgow, and Gary actually worked in the shop where we were doing the Sleeze signing. There came this very quiet tapping behind us and this little voice said "Can you see me samples?" And I was revolted actually as he just stood there holding them (General laughter to genitalia connotations)

No, he showed me his portfolio and it was very, very good stuff. I think it was the same samples he'd sent in to 2000AD. He had a really sharp distinctive style. Dan was scouting for people for **Strip** at that time, and he said "I'll definitely ear-mark you for something on **Strip**".

D.A: John Carnell, the **Sleeze Bros**. writer was keen on him as well.

A.L: And he wrote 'Three Miles High' with him in mind for **Strip**. About the time that went on, **Pendragon** came up.

S.W: Yeah, I saw the samples sitting on Dan's desk and at the time Dan was writing the whole comic. We tried various other artists at the time. Jenny at the time was really keen for us to use a name artist and we were finding it increasingly difficult to find someone who wanted to work for Marvel UK (Laughter). We tried Arthur Ranson and John Ridgway, but basically they were far too busy. Time was running out, and I saw these samples, and showed them to John and he liked them so, I took them to Jenny and she was 'They're a bit static', but I said all he needs is a bit of good editing - unfortunately he got me as editor (Laughter)

D.A: The primary concern of course was that he hadn't really done anything before. It was one thing giving him an 8 page story in **Strip**, but 22 pages on a regular basis...

S.W: We went down to UKCAC last year. He'd done some samples which we showed to Jenny. She said OK, let's go for it. I mean, we had enough firepower with Alan Davis doing the covers, and Captain Britain, and with that we had enough leeway to let a new artist have a crack of the whip.

I assume working full script as you do, the pacing was more down to the writers as well, making it easier.

D.A: Yes.

Andy, as the inker on the book what is it that you bring to the work on Gary's pencils?

A.L: With the inking, there's a story in that as well, just how I came to do it really. I was practising inking just cos' I wanted to do some inking to tighten up on my own stuff. So I was photocopying pages off everybody when I came in, and just borrowed some of Gary's from **Pendragon** - And Steve really liked it.

S.W: And on the train to Angouleme I persuaded Jenny to let Andy ink it.

D.A: There was an inker already on the book.

J.T: A very professional and respected inker, but unfortunately his style just didn't suit Gary's pencils.

S.W: They were too slick and it needed a more rugged style.

J.T: It was something we had all thought, but when we saw Andy's samples, we saw how Gary's pencils should look and we realised we'd had doubts about the inks to begin with. I would say the guy was a good inker, his style just wasn't suited to Gary's pencils.

Will you continue to ink the title as you've a lot of other work coming up?

A.L: What's happened is as of #6 I'm sharing the inking with Bambos Georgiou. He did some background stuff on #5 because we found the deadlines were getting even shorter, as they always do. We felt confident enough with his stuff that on #s 6, 7 and 8 we basically split it 50/50.

On #9 Bambos is doing about 80%, and I'm doing about 2 panels on a page. #10 I don't think I'll be inking at all, mainly because I'll be fully committed on pencilling **The Sleeze Brothers** by then. I also want to ink the **Punisher** story that Dan and I are writing and Dougie Braithwaite is pencilling. Hopefully what will happen is I'll finish **The Sleeze Bros** and pick up **Pendragon** again and do **Punisher** at the same time.

Hopefully Bambos will be alright about that, because he's busy himself anyway. We've been working very closely and initially he was copying the style I'd set. So what we've been doing with this issue, I've been doing 2 panels on a page, to give Bambos a visual hold. Now, I think he's found his own way to do it which is fine.

'Some Like it Fresh' is the Sleeze Brothers title.

A.L: That's gonna be a 48-page one-shot.

Knights of Pendragon

I've told you the outline before - about the fresh air - jolly japes for all I think! That'll be coming out early next year, between March and May.

Is it likely to be serialised in Strip? (General laughter, and the word no - echoes around the boardroom)

D.A: We've just cancelled **Strip**.

Oh right! (Hits head against desk) **That saves asking six questions!** (General laughter)

D.A: It was getting to #20-21 and sales weren't as good as we'd hoped them to be.

It was fortnightly, would that be a factor involved in it?

S.W: We've discussed this long and hard, why we think it failed. Our general agreement was that there was not enough originated material.

D.A: And the real demand seemed to be for general escapist adventure type stuff. It would have survived for a good few issues yet, tailing away slowly, particularly if we employed life-saving devices like going monthly - But the problem would have been #21 when we were going to start the new David Lloyd and Jamie Delano **Night Raven**. And I lived in mortal dread of actually beginning that and then having the magazine fold under it and being left with half a serial, which would just crucify the project. We decided just last week, the best thing would be to stop **Strip** immediately before it reached its natural death. **Night Raven** could then retain its integrity as a project and be brought out as a Graphic Novel early next year in its entirety. There is now a vacancy for an anthology magazine which we are now developing to replace **Strip** and possibly do the things in it we didn't do with **Strip** and make it work.

Steve, how do you go about the task of editing these people?

S.W: It depends on who I'm dealing with at the time. I think with Dan and John who I know as friends, we discuss a lot of things socially... I mean **Pendragon** was born down the pub. We had problems when it first started, but we dealt with it fairly amicably. Gary Erskine on the other hand, I think because he's new, we've had a few problems with. He's probably going to be in floods of tears if he hears this. He did OK and then I really don't know what happened.

A.L: He hit the wall?

S.W: ..Yeah. And he slipped back and I really had to come down hard on him. Stuff was arriving late, some things were bad in it, and I was sending some stuff back to him just to teach him a lesson. You know, I'm not going to accept this, do it properly or you don't do it at all, and hopefully we've overcome the problems.

A.L: And Gary's becoming a better artist because of it. It is his first work. Steve's had to take him by the hand and lead him through it.

'THE STORM HAD DOWNED THE CHOPPER. THEN THESE THINGS HAD COME FROM... NOWHERE AND TORE THE PILOT LIMB FROM LIMB.
AHHH!
I'D NEVER IMAGINED I'D DIE THIS WAY. THIS UNBELIEVABLE, STUPID, STUPID WAY.

S.W: I think, like a lot of young artists they resent being told their work has mistakes in it, and initially we were playing a game where I would list things that I wanted changed, and Gary would do this point system, if he agreed with what I was saying he would give me a point, and he had to learn that I would always win - He was young, still doing things that were -

Well you're all relatively young. I don't think any of you have hit 30 yet? (Laughter)

J.T: Give me another month.

In any type of job, you have to accept that you're going to do things wrong to begin with.

J.T: There's certain things about Gary's drawing that have improved by leaps and bounds over the issues. When he draws somewhere, whether it's Africa or the Outer Hebrides there's a real sense of place about it. He researches very thoroughly. When he gave us the first character sketches of Gawain, he'd researched the armour and weapons that a knight of that era would wear.

S.W: Perhaps that could be one of his failings, that he's so committed to every page, he works so hard on everything. He does two or three versions of breakdowns before he comes to the final version of it - and it's one of the things I'm trying to get him out of, to help him speed up. When #1 came out a lot of people said 'Oh, no, we don't like the artwork at all', but as he's improved; like Simon Bisley actually said he's one of his favourite comic artists. Which Gary took as a major compliment, which I think we all felt chuffed about.

A.L: And the other thing is, it's Steve's job as the editor to find faults. I think because both John and Dan are editors as well. Gary hasn't got a hope in hell really (Laughter)

S.W: But I think the end result is better for him - I mean this is what he finally admitted, the fact that I was continuously getting at him, but when he stepped back, on a logical level, it was only doing him good.

J.T: But they're all just teething troubles. The more he goes along he'll put all this behind him.

A.L: I think we should all state on the record here that Gary is a very good artist, and has a very bright future ahead of him.

D.A: Some of the things Gary's managed to put down on paper I couldn't believe that they actually were visualised. We put some fairly stiff demands in the scripts of what should be seen.

J.T: Also the Scarecrow was a very vague character, we said he's to look like a sinister Worzel Gummidge and didn't think of it in any more depth than that. He basically created a whole new character which we then worked into the rest of the series.

S.W: This is what I'm saying; as a new artist he was extremely brave, because he would take a panel and do something very difficult with it, he wouldn't just follow the descriptions, he put a lot of effort in. The first four pages of **Pendragon** are the ones I give as samples to new artists just to see how they compare. I still think Gary's is one of the best jobs - I think we would probably all agree that if we could go back and re-do #1 we would.

J.T: A lot of these problems were in the script as well.

Then the creative line-up will stay for the forseeable future?

J.T: Not if Gary reads this interview! (Laughter)

S.W: Helen (Stone) with her colouring has really come on - **Pendragon** was really her first colouring job too. She's done outstandingly well. If you take a look at the colours she did for #6 it's an amazing job.

Does Helen have to tone down the colours for the reproduction on scangloss?

A.L: I think the process of (colour) separation has changed over the issues. If you look at #1 they're a bit flat, a bit too two-dimensional, but with #5 some of the

Artwork TM & © Marvel Entertainment Group; Pendragon #6

colours like the greeney-blues in the flashback are really beautiful. There are subtle shades in there.

J.T: With the first issue the mechanical colour was done by an Italian company and we weren't particularly happy with it, but the subsequent issues were put together in Yugoslavia and they have a much greater subtlety of line and shade.

S.W: And when we do the trade paperback we will probably take the first issue back for recolouring.

Alan Davis was supposed to do the original six covers, but he dropped out with #5, would you like to say why?

S.W: At that time we'd been told that the bar code box would go on the back. But it was actually while I was on holiday they changed their mind and had to put it on the front, by that time another four covers had been commissioned and it was too late to do anything about them. With the first and second one we actually had to cut it on in the film. And Alan when he saw this was non-too pleased.

J.T: And justifiably as well. There is no logical reason why a bar code shouldn't go on the back. This is something that the people concerned were not prepared to listen to.

S.W: I was pretty incensed by the fact that they made us change it, and completely sympathise with Alan. It was just unfortunate he'd actually pencilled #6's cover and was just about to ink it, when I sent him the copies of #2. He saw it and thought, well, you know - this was one of the reasons why he stopped working for Marvel UK.

J.T: He's also not entirely happy with our treatment of Captain Britain. What we've tried to do is hint at the darker side of his charater - the negative aspects that you don't generally see in **Excalibur**. For example, issue #5 where he kills Dai Thomas. We were writing from the standpoint of what would *really* happen if a character this powerful lost his rag and went for Joe Public - and, of course, it would have been a great deal bloodier even than it appeared. As far as Alan was concerned, we weren't writing his character. It might have been Freddy Krueger meets Dai Thomas, but it wasn't Captain Britain.

S.W: Actually it's not really Cap. Britain because the way we've worked it into the story is that he's like Lancelot at that point.

J.T: The scenario is that Dai Thomas is not going to be stopped whatever happens. He's using every means he can to stop Cap. Britain. It eventually succeeds with Cap. Britain losing his rag. In a very fast scene he knocks hell out of Dai, but of course it takes a whole page to get through that sequence. Alan Davis' contention was that it looked as if the scene was being dragged out - as if Cap. Britain actually *enjoyed* kicking hell out of Dai. He felt that the whole scene was just far too bloody, and totally out of character for Cap. Britain. He's got a point - I mean, what we were effectively doing was adding a whole new dimension to an existing character that his creator didn't feel should be there.

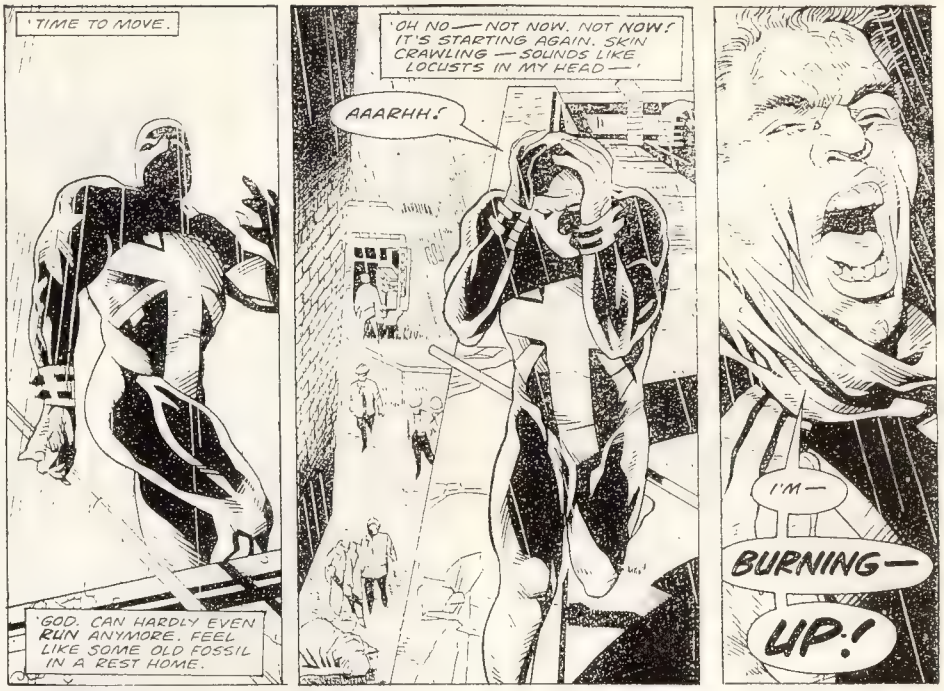
S.W: In an effort to placate - I mean Terry Kavanagh, the editor on **Excalibur**, and I think Tom (De Falco) as well, weren't particularly happy with the treatment.

J.T: We should also point out though, that full plots for every issue were sent out to Alan, Terry and Chris Claremont before we started writing #1. Of course there's a big difference between reading a plot and actually seeing a page of gallons of haemoglobin flying around - It's a pretty shocking issue.

S.W: To try and even the situation up we're actually going to write a scene in where we explain at the time at Avalon, Cap. Britain was actually Lancelot. People who know and read about Lancelot will know he was prone to these berserk rages. The film that's actually got it most accurate was **Monty Python and the Holy Grail** with Lancelot going completely bonkers and killing all those people. In the myth that's how he was, he would snap and go round slaughtering people. John is writing a scene in where Cap. Britain goes to see Dai

A.L: And rips his arms and legs off!

Artwork TM & © Marvel Entertainment Group; Pendragon #7


'TIME TO MOVE.
'OH NO — NOT NOW. NOT NOW! IT'S STARTING AGAIN. SKIN CRAWLING — SOUNDS LIKE LOCUSTS IN MY HEAD —'
AAARHH!
'GOD. CAN HARDLY EVEN RUN ANYMORE. FEEL LIKE SOME OLD FOSSIL IN A REST HOME.
I'M —
BURNING —
UP!

(Laughter)

S.W: This was in the script for #9. We actually had a scene where John had written: Dai is riddled with bullets. I read it and went 'Oh, no not again' (Laughter) So I said to John, 'No, I'm sorry we can't do this' so we rewrote the scene and instead of getting shot up he just gets zapped electrically, he's a bit stunned and he ends up in hospital.

And Captain Britain goes to see him and there's like this sort of really big guilt thing and Dai says 'Don't worry I know why you did it.' And hopefully that will kind of ease the situation by explaining it a bit more.

J.T: Had we #5 to write over again, I think I'd have written it essentially the same, but with greater emphasis on the fact that C. B. was also under the Pendragon influence - and with less gore slurping around as well.

So Simon Bisley is doing the cover to #6. Who else from then on?

S.W: A complete unknown called Ross Dearsley for #7 who we met also on the Pendragon tour - he had some samples, I looked at and thought oh this guy's good. At the time we were looking for a very surreal cover.

D.A: He works for the Richard Williams Animation Studios.

S.W: And he's a real fan of Bill Sienkiewicz which comes out in his stuff. He turned in the cover which was outstanding. Mark Farmer is doing #8. John Bolton is doing #9 and 10, Simon Bisley #11, and Gary himself is actually doing a painted cover for #12.

A.L: I won't be doing bugger all. Nicely inked though in't they? (Laughter) At least they are from 7 or 8 onwards.

Iron-Man will be appearing -

S.W: It was decided some time ago and he is appearing in a very logical manner.

D.A: It's not a standard Marvel - guest star happens to be flying past, or the Murder, She Wrote syndrome, where she's staying with a friend and somebody gets killed next door. He actually gets woven into the plot long before he appears.

Excalibur?

S.W: I don't think that's going to happen now - They may appear in the long term, but the way we've got it planned it's just Captain Britain.

D.A: 11 and 12 run up to a fairly massive climactic confrontation and by that time we're dealing with a fairly large cast of characters, and if we suddenly put in another five members from **Excalibur** it would get very crowded indeed.

When will Union Jack debut?

S.W: He appears from #7 onwards. He'll be one of the new Pendragons. We've been pretty much given carte blanche to do what we want with him.

D.A: We will be able to do the things with him we weren't allowed to do with Captain Britain.

Will you reform the Invaders if we go to war? (General laughter)

D.A: By the time Union Jack appears in **Pendragon** there will have been a brief but sweet reunion of the Invaders in **Namor** - whether that will have any long lasting effect I don't know.

A.L: Maybe they could all get together at Namor's place and drown? (Laughter)

So the future looks rosy for the title?

S.W: About as rosy as it will get. Naturally we would like it to be selling more, certainly in this country, it's doing fairly stout work in the States.

J.T: We've got plenty of ideas of how we'd like to continue it, I just hope we get the chance to do them all, the story could go off in so many different directions.

A.L: As indeed could the inker! (Laughter)

J.T: Completely off the page!

I wondered if you had intended to bring back the Black Knight?

J.T: Marvel US are very keen for us to come up with our own characters. It's just that you're caught in the cleft stick, that even though you can have your own characters you have to build up sales right from the ground floor and guest star well-known characters like Cap. Britain or whoever - I don't know, we've got to try and negotiate the two stools really and create new characters but - (Laughter) Just because I said stools?!

Do you have much contact with the US division?

S.W: We do now. This is one of the things that came out of Pendragon, the fact that there wasn't enough contact between the two points, and we decided we should start liasing a bit more. They came to UKCAC and we try to get out there.

O.K. Thanks a lot. Do you want the last word Andy?

A.L: Andy Lanning, inker (Laughter)

From left to right: Messrs. Lanning, Abnett, Tomlinson and White.

STEED AND MRS PEEL

By James Wallis

IN the United States last year, a TV commercial for some new car or other was screened nationwide. Against a backing of the **James Bond** theme, the new model speeds down a highway pursued by several other cars, which are all shaken off during the next forty-five seconds. Finally the car pulls off the road, the door opens and Patrick Macnee looks the viewer straight in the eye. "Well," he says with a grin, "who were you expecting?"

It's a good question. Of the two series, **The Avengers** has always beaten the Bond movies into second place. Crucially, **The Avengers** started first. Its initial episode was transmitted on January 7th 1961, while the first real Bond movie, **Dr. No**, had to wait until 1962. By that time **The Avengers** had already introduced the strong female sidekick (initially Cathy Gale, as played by Honor Blackman), the cliquey world of espionage, the strange gadgetry, the sinister organisations bent on world domination, and most importantly the sense of British elegance and style that pervaded the programme. It was this that made the TV series a classic of the 1960's, and one of the most important influences on all television series since. James Bond lags behind, still borrowing ideas and even whole scenes from its influential senior: the final scene in **Moonraker** is an almost direct steal from the last scene of 'Bizarre', the final **Avengers** episode.

The Avengers is still fresh and enjoyable today. Its last episode may have been broadcast in 1969, but reruns have kept it vivid in the mind of the viewing public, while the sight of Diana Rigg in her infamous catsuit warped the minds of so many prepubescent boys in the 1960's that the series has established a cult following around the world. The influence of the original series and the particular chemistry of its main players has remained so strong that later attempts to revive **The Avengers** in other formats have all failed. Two series of **The New Avengers** had modest success in the 1970's, while stage plays and radio plays have failed. A long-planned film never appeared. With the thirtieth anniversary of the transmission of the first episode fast approaching and Weintraub, the company with the rights to the series, planning nothing, it seemed as though **The Avengers**' true fans were destined to clutch their video cassettes of the Channel 4 repeats and sigh wistfully.

Late last year, British publisher Acme Comics learned that the rights to produce

YOU'LL HAVE TO EXCUSE ME, WHILE I FINISH THIS ENCLOSED PAPER-WORK.
DIDN'T I SEE YOU AT POSEY FAINSMITH'S FUNERAL?
SHH! KEEP YOUR VOICE DOWN
I CAN'T TALK NOW.
MEET ME TOMORROW NIGHT, AFTER DORIS STOKE'S FUNERAL AT THE HARE AND HOUNDS PUB IN WHITE-CHAPEL...
AHUM
YOUR APPLICATION FORM, SIR
THAT'S IF YOU STILL WANT IT.
THE HARE AND HOUNDS, FIVE TEN O' CLOCK
PALADINES
OH, I WANT IT ALL RIGHT
I'M NOT JUST PLAYING GAMES, YOU KNOW.

a comic book based on **The Avengers** were available, and wasted little time in snapping them up. Acme may be small but it has great contacts and by April it had signed contracts with Grant Morrison and Ian Gibson to produce a three-issue mini-series. Grant's name is almost synonymous with the current British domination of DC comics; he single-handedly recreated **The Doom Patrol** and **Animal Man** in his own image (doing so almost literally in the case of **Animal Man**) and earlier this year picked up an Eagle Award for **Arkham Asylum**, his graphic novel starring a post-modern Batman and a Joker even more deranged

STILL INVESTIGATING THE DEATH OF EVELYN GAINES THE LONDON JEWELLERY MAID WHO WAS FOUND MURDERED IN HIS HOME TWO DAYS AGO
GLASS, WHO WAS STABBED SEVERAL TIMES WITH WHAT POLICE BELIEVE WAS A CHANDELIER CRYSTAL, WAS BEST KNOWN FOR HIS APPEARANCES ON TV'S ANTIQUES BONANZA
TWO POUND THEM
TWO POUND ? YOU JUST COME BACK FROM THE POST OFFICE YOU CAN DO BETTER THAN TWO POUND !
LAST ON THE BIG SPENDERS!
HAVANA
ALL RIGHT THEN A FIVER, A FIVER ON THE GROWN
THAT'S MORE LIKE IT
TWO POUND!
RIGHT! SHUT UP!

than normal. Ian Gibson has drawn pretty well everything at some time or another, but is best known for his beautiful art on the critically acclaimed three volumes of **Halo Jones**, his work for **2000AD** on 'Judge Dredd' and 'Sam Slade: Robohunter' and more recently the beautiful **Chronicles of Genghis Grimtoad** for Marvel UK. A formidable team indeed, but can they revive the flagging fortunes of **The Avengers**? More importantly, which one wears the bowler?

The comic series will be called **Steed and Mrs. Peel**, and reunites those two most famous of the Avengers after Tara King, Steed's final female companion played originally by Linda Thorson, disappears in mysterious circumstances. The first issue is due for release on January 7th, the exact 30th anniversary of the TV show. The production hasn't been entirely without mishap, however. There have been problems over the rights to use "distinctive likenesses" of Patrick Macnee and Diana Rigg, caused more by their agents than by the actors themselves. This delayed things until September, when Ian Gibson was able to start on the artwork.

Grant Morrison was characteristically reserved when asked about the series, but did say that he'd enjoyed writing it. Did he accept Acme's offer immediately? "Well no, actually I didn't want to do it because I thought it would be too much work. But basically I felt that anybody else wouldn't do it right, so I accepted." Katie Byrd, one of the editors at Acme, was more forthcoming. "**The Avengers** is something that he has quite a passion for, he's a fan most definitely. I think that after all the arguments about **Arkham Asylum** it's something completely different, something that he could really get his teeth into and have a bit of fun. It's not at all like the way he's been writing superhero comics. It's much more in the spirit of the original TV series. He's done quite a lot of research. There's a few little touches that are recognizable as Grant Morrison."

The comic centres around a theme of board games, but in a sinister context. People are dying or disappearing, each death or disappearance linked in some way to a game or riddle. In this respect it's not unlike an episode from the final series of the **Avengers** entitled simply "Game", although Morrison's plot seems more tangled and rather less 1960's. It also gives Ian Gibson the excuse to recreate the feel of some of the more extraordinary locations and incidents of

Steed & Mrs. Peel TM & © Weintraub Entertainment Ltd.

Steed and Mrs Peel

the TV series. Steed first encounters Mother (the **Avengers** version of Bond's 'M') in an extraordinary sewer office, and there are appearances by giant playing card figures and the biggest ship in a bottle you're ever likely to see. There are also three funerals in the first episode, so perhaps the writing isn't so uncharacteristic of Grant Morrison after all.

Ian Gibson hasn't worked with Grant Morrison before **Steed and Mrs. Peel** and was largely unaware of his reputation as the *enfant terrible* of British comics. "I've been sent a lot of stuff from America and I've noticed Grant's work in there, with a very bizarre bunch of characters. I haven't let that push me in any particular direction, because I have my own feeling about the way that the series would have gone. I'm just trying to go along with that and capture the feel of the **Avengers** series. It's very tongue in cheek. I'm trying to keep it very light and airy as opposed to very dark and sombre, the way that somebody might interpret Grant."

However strong Morrison's script, it is Gibson's artwork that gives the series its polish. Part of the reason he was originally approached was his past record of drawing likenesses, and here he has managed to capture both Steed and Emma Peel perfectly, retaining their style if not their exact appearance. "One of the main problems is that Emma Peel, Diana Rigg, has got such a difficult face to capture. You look at the photographs and they don't actually look like her, so you think "How the hell am I going to illustrate a woman whose photographs don't even look like her?" Sometimes I've caught her, but only occasionally. I've tried to steer away from direct caricature, although occasionally I feel I've slipped a bit. I could point out lots of places where I've done Steed an injustice..." Gibson is worrying unduly, noticing flaws in his artwork which the casual reader will never pick up, except possibly to note that his version of Tara King is a lot more svelte than the actress Linda Thorson ever was. More importantly, his art is delicate and finely balanced and his colouring is simply superb, making the series glow. This is a comic to look at and go "oooOOOOooo".

There was, however, one slight problem. **Steed and Mrs. Peel** was to be a three-issue mini-series, and Grant Morrison had written a story with four chapters. This means that chapters one and two will appear in the first issue, while the second and third issues will feature a back-up strip starring Mrs. Peel and probably the one character you wouldn't expect to appear beside her - Mr. Peel. It has been written by Anne Caulfield, a writer new to comics but with a number of stage and TV credits to her name including two plays (**The Dead** and **Cowboys**) and scripts for Lenny Henry. Katie Byrd explained the change of emphasis.

"From Grant's initial synopsis Emma Peel didn't seem to get a very big role in the action. So we thought 'Well, there's a lot of fans who love Emma Peel; let's use her a little bit more'. Anne's written a story which starts with the final point of Diana Rigg's last Avengers TV episode in which her husband, Peter Peel, returns from the Amazonian jungle having been lost there for something like six years. He was a test pilot and his plane crashed. The story starts at exactly the moment when she meets her husband again. They go off for a second honeymoon in a little seaside English village called Cringle On Sea. Things are not as they seem to be, and they face a variety of problems."

"It's called 'Deadly Rainbow' and visually it's going to be a very nice story. It's drawn by Ian as well. It's the first time Anne's ever written a comic but she knows how to write. She seems to have enjoyed it as well, and may write a few more. We can give ourselves a little plug as it's part of our movement towards getting new people, especially women, into writing comics. There are not enough good writers in comics. There are too many people who write comics who have always read comics, who always want to read comics and who only write comics."

So far **Steed and Mrs. Peel** seems to be developing well, but will it satisfy both today's comic fans who are expecting violence, sex and post-modernism, and the older **Avengers** fan who is hoping for a blast from the past? There will be hell to pay if it doesn't, but Acme thinks it will work. They've been working closely with Dave Rogers who runs the **Avengers** fanclub and who has also written a number of books on the subject. He is now one of the consulting editors on the project. If he likes it, the indications are that the fans will be happy.

However, the crucial point must be the comic's sense of style. **The Avengers** was ground-breaking in its use of high technology, giving the series a timeless feel which was blended seamlessly with the style and verve of the sixties. To be simultaneously timeless and still a period piece is something which came about almost by accident; to set out to do something like that is to invite failure. Yet Morrison and Gibson seem to have succeeded. Not only have they captured the atmosphere of the original TV series at its evergreen best, a reader of this series would be hard-pressed to say exactly when it was set. On first reading it looks like the 1960's, with appropriate clothing and manners, but then you suddenly remember little touches like the very modern computer, and notice the date on the champagne label. **Steed and Mrs. Peel** actually feels like the old **Avengers** and, more importantly, it's a cracking good read as well.

Steed and Mrs. Peel is being co-produced with Eclipse Comics who are distributing the comic in the USA. Initial orders there have been a little disappointing. More interesting has been the reaction from Europe, where the **Avengers** are still fondly remembered; the original series was shown in around 160 countries and the **New Avengers** was co-financed by French television. A French publisher is currently interested in the rights to the book, which may mean that a limited run of a large-format hardback will be available.

Acme are also interested in the possibility of doing a second **Avengers** series if the first one is a success. Grant Morrison has said that he "probably" wouldn't want to write it, but if his scripts manage to guarantee the characters a new lease of life in the comics format, the hard part of the battle will have been won and a new writer could easily take over. Still, this first series is a treat. You can almost hear the cultured tones of Patrick Macnee ringing across the panorama of Ian Gibson's London. It's enough to make a chap start wearing a bowler again.

Steed & Mrs. Peel TM & © Weintraub Entertainment Ltd.

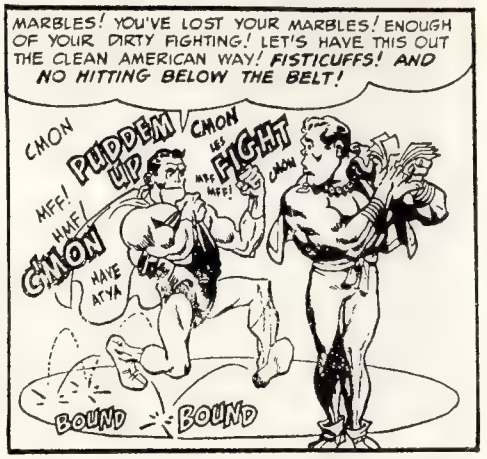
The Great Superhero Sendup

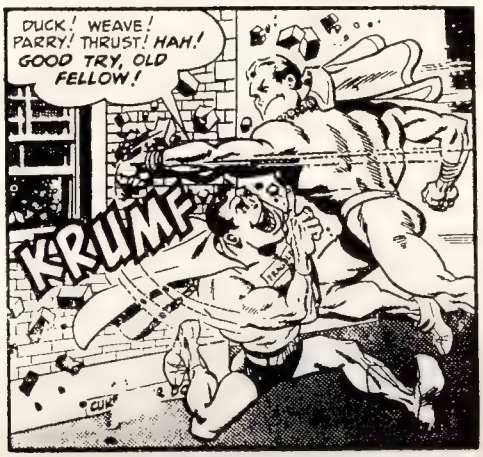
By Mike Kidson

FANTAZIA #3's review of **Green-Grey Sponge-Suit Sushi Turtles** set me off on the following chain of thought: Mirage have published an official parody of their own **Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles** title, which was A] first parodied (**Adolescent Black-Belt Radioactive Hamsters**) some years ago, B] bears a title which parodied the mid-eighties proliferation of DC/ Marvel teen team comics and C] in its first issue parodied "Daredevil's" origin (for those who don't remember, the canister of radioactive waste which bounced off Matt Murdock's forehead bounced a bit further and broke, engulfing some baby turtles!) I think bemusement is the word for what I felt...

Once I'd escaped from that mental equivalent of a Chinese finger trap I started wondering why Eastman and Laird should want to parody an already parodied parody. Simple answer: when it first appeared **TMNT** was just another independent comic, but now the streets are awash with Turtle T-shirts containing avid consumers (or so, I assume, Mirage hope). And anyway, *was* **TMNT** really a parody? Looking back at the early issues, it appears to be an affectionate homage to Japanese manga which contains periodic references to DC's and Marvel's (then) bestsellers. As such, it reminds me of Dave Sim's **Cerebus**, which was originally an affectionate parody of Barry Smith's **Conan** and later developed its own individual momentum (while still occasionally featuring the superheroic parody figure of the 'All-Purpose' Roach). By now the questions were multiplying: why did Sim in effect begin the self-publishing/independent comics boom with a parody? Was he drawing on any long-standing tradition? And so on ... a lot of reading later I'd established the following picture of, as its originator might have put it, the whole fershlugginer mess...

That originator was Harvey Kurtzman, writer/editor/artist of superb 'war is hell' stories for EC's **Two-Fisted Tales** and **Frontline Combat**, who in 1952 developed the first satirical comicbook - **Mad**. **Mad**'s style - caricaturing of media personalities, pointed exaggeration of absurdities in the media and society in general, lots of extraneous sight gags - has by now become familiar and even comfortable. But Kurtzman's original was a good deal more hard-hitting than the modern magazine version, constituting a merciless critique of mass media informed by its author's thorough understanding of his targets. Kurtzman's exposure of the techniques of advertising, journalism, television and the movies earned **Mad** a chapter to itself in Marshall McLuhan's seminal book **Understanding Media** - but within the comics field, his parodies of





superheroics were particularly influential.

In **Superduperman, Batboy and Rubin** and **Woman Wonder**, Kurtzman posed the question "what if superheroes were idiots?". His answer was that they would both be ridiculous and dangerous - "Supes" is ultimately an ineffectual creep who leaves a trail of destruction in his wake, while "Batboy", after wiping out a vicious gang of toddlers and women, turns out to be a vampire. "Woman Wonder" was treated differently - since the original still retained a feminist slant in the early Fifties, Kurtzman's version ridiculed the book's bizarre apparatus and finally reduced the heroine to slavery over a sink. All three parodies, though, displayed the same essential technique: by depicting each hero as an inept buffoon, Kurtzman transformed the notional heroic ideal into an expression of power without responsibility or even ability, a chaotic concept fleshed out by the manic finished art (replete with sight gags) of Wally Wood and Bill Elder. The result was pretty subversive - or would have been if anyone had taken superheroes seriously.

But in the early Fifties superheroes were as much a thing of the past as DC's Dollar Comics are today. After the war, comics had begun to investigate other genres - horror, war stories, romance, crime, science fiction, westerns. Kurtzman's sendups of superheroics were dated even at the time and might well have become mere historical oddities had it not been for the public outcry against comics which swept through America and Britain in 1954. Following a year of senatorial enquiries and media attacks, the major comicbook publishers drew up the self-regulatory Comics Code - and the comics scene changed enormously. Comics were henceforth officially defined as juvenile material, so horror and crime books were outlawed - not-so-coincidentally, it's rumoured, wiping out all of EC's books except **Mad** (and that, for safety's sake, was transformed into a magazine). The other neo-genres survived in watered down form; science fiction in particular soon became a prime element of the new Silver Age of Superheroics.

As the American national consciousness shifted away from Cold War paranoia towards Space Age optimism in the late Fifties, superheroics began to make as much sense as they had during the war. The heroic ideal they embodied dovetailed neatly with the new patriotism of the Kennedy era. At DC, old characters were revived, their origins altered to reflect the current interest in science. For Timely/Marvel, Jack Kirby developed new characters set amidst a heady milieu of up-to-the-minute popular science and soap opera. Superheroes were serious business - sending them up must have seemed out of the question, even unpatriotic. Not until a new style of humour caught on did parody again become viable in mainstream comics.

'Camp' humour and parody are very similar; parody accentuates the absurdity of a familiar situation or subject by imitating it humourously, while 'camp' achieves the same effect by playing it straight but over the top. Film producer Albert Broccoli's 'campy' adaptations of the James Bond novels were enormously successful in the early Sixties and did much to promote a craze for 'camp' humour. The manifestations of that craze most relevant to comics were the **Man From U.N.C.L.E.** and **Batman** TV shows. Where other media lead, the comics industry tends to follow; by the mid-Sixties DC's "Batman" titles had been revamped in the style of the TV show and it wasn't long before an original 'camp' title was produced. **The Inferior Five**, a teen team comic about the inept children of various veteran superheroes (one wonders whether Roy Thomas had it in mind when he devised **Infinity Inc.**!) stuck mostly to 'camp' - but it incorporated parodic references to Marvel characters, including a wrestler named "Brute Brainard" who turned into a green giant wearing purple shorts and a school

Artwork TM & © Respective Owners

The Great Superhero Sendup

for 'atavistic throwbacks' run by Professor Echhs.

'Echh' was a self-explanatory catchphrase developed by **Mad** - by the mid-Sixties it was regularly turning up in Marvel Bullpen Bulletins in reference to DC's output. Someone at Marvel was clearly a **Mad** devotee, so it was hardly surprising that Marvel's first entry into the humour field copied every trick in the book from Kurtzman's brainchild. Although **Not Brand Echh** lacked **Mad**'s critical

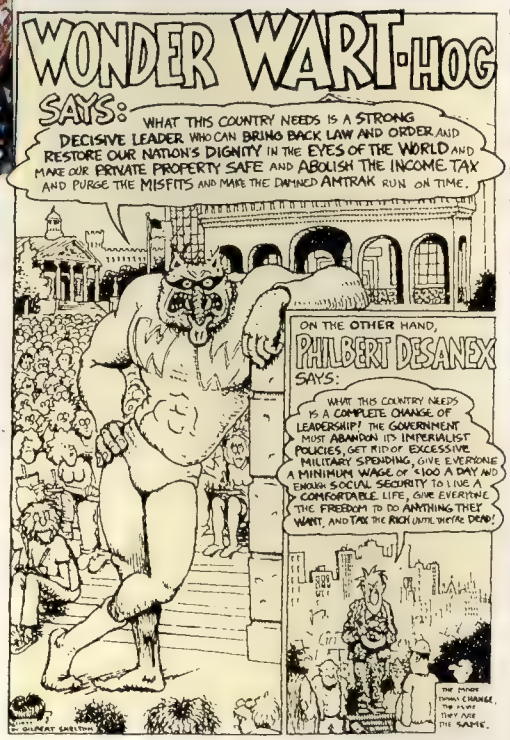
viewpoint, its parodies of Marvel characters displayed a wry self-awareness - Gary Friedrich' and Marie Severin's **S.H.I.E.L.D.** sendup involved a three-way tussle between "Knock Furious", the T.H.U.N.D.E.R. Agents and the men from U.N.C.L.E. (the latter won). **Mad** copy or not, it remains the funniest parody book ever published by the mainstream and is worth searching out for its rare and delightful examples of Jack Kirby's humourous art (sending up his own creations!)

Since both books had latched onto the tail end of the 'camp' craze, neither lasted for very long. By 1968 the interests of American youth were shifting towards political concerns - feminism, environmental pollution - and comics, after a fashion, followed suit, becoming deadly serious. Satire was to appear in mainstream comics during the disillusioned post-Watergate Seventies - but by then it reflected developments which had been taking place outside the mainstream since the Fifties.

At which point it becomes necessary to draw a distinction between parody and satire. Parody is humourous imitation, satire is humourous criticism; the former can make critical points, the latter necessarily does so. After the Comics Code, parody was for many years apparently considered to be a risky proposition by the mainstream comics publishers - satire was out of the question. Not that satirical comics had ceased to exist - in effect, the Code had driven them underground, thus preparing the way for the 'comix' explosion in the late Sixties. In fact, there's a direct link between the pre-Code **Mad** and the underground comix - the post-Code career of Harvey Kurtzman.

Having left **Mad** shortly after it became a magazine, Kurtzman continued to produce satirical material, meeting with only limited success until 1960. From then until 1965 he edited a magazine for Jim Warren (who was later to publish the first serious post-Code horror comics). **Help!** featured a new strip by Kurtzman and Elder (**Goodman Beaver**), experimented with fumetti and, most significantly, showcased the work of young artists, including Robert Crumb and Gilbert Shelton. In 1962 a key panel of **Goodman Beaver** equated the "Superman" costume with a Quixotic sensibility: later in the same year a new regular feature by Shelton made the same point but sharpened it considerably.

Rather than satirising a specific superhero, Shelton appears to have taken a fresh look at the concept of superheroics. What he came up with was an equation of the superheroic ideal with the American Dream: superhero as establishment figurehead. Twisting that idea around, he devised **Wonder Warthog**, a staunch defender of American values.


WONDER WART-HOG
SAYS:
WHAT THIS COUNTRY NEEDS IS A STRONG DECISIVE LEADER WHO CAN BRING BACK LAW AND ORDER AND RESTORE OUR NATION'S DIGNITY IN THE EYES OF THE WORLD AND MAKE OUR PRIVATE PROPERTY SAFE AND ABOLISH THE INCOME TAX AND PURGE THE MISFITS AND MAKE THE DAMNED AMTRAK RUN ON TIME.
ON THE OTHER HAND,
PHILBERT DESANEX
SAYS:
WHAT THIS COUNTRY NEEDS IS A COMPLETE CHANGE OF LEADERSHIP! THE GOVERNMENT MUST ABANDON ITS IMPERIALIST POLICIES, GET RID OF EXCESSIVE MILITARY SPENDING, GIVE EVERYONE A MINIMUM WAGE OF $100 A DAY AND ENOUGH SOCIAL SECURITY TO LIVE A COMFORTABLE LIFE, GIVE EVERYONE THE FREEDOM TO DO ANYTHING THEY WANT, AND TAX THE RICH UNTIL THEY'RE DEAD!
THE THINGS CHANGE, THE MORE THEY ARE THE SAME.

Shelton's grotesque, redneck Hog of Steel was only incidentally a satire of superheroics; the real point of the strip was that it (ab)used the superheroic concept in order to satirise the Establishment. In these post-punk days of anti-heroes, that point seems rather blunted - the "Warthog" and the "Punisher" are not entirely dissimilar - but in the Sixties it must have been clear to Shelton's readers that they were being directed to question the value system that such a monstrosity supported so ardently. By the end of the decade, a whole new generation was questioning those values as a matter of course; the appearance of a superhero costume in an underground comic had become instantly recognisable as an icon representing outmoded ideals.

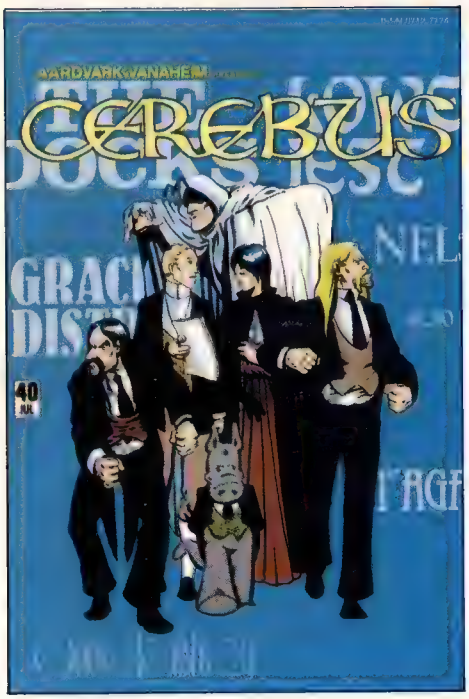
In 1976, after Watergate had forced the American public at large to question the responsibility of those entrusted with fulfilling those ideals, Marvel published a comic in which mainstream parody and underground satire came together for the first time since **Mad**'s early days. Steve Gerber's **Howard the Duck** starred an intellectual and streetwise fowl who was thrust from one genre satire - barbarian story, space opera, kung fu, superheroics and so on - to another. Using the duck as a relatively objective commentator on the foibles of 'hairless apes', Gerber worked within the established 'reality' of the Marvel Universe to produce stories which ridiculed both that 'reality' and real life itself. The series peaked after ten issues when "Howard" reacted to the zany circumstances into which he had been forced by undergoing a nervous breakdown: although Gerber kept going for another year or so, the book became increasingly aimless and cynical. Shortly after its creator left it was cancelled by its corporate owners under pressure from the copyright holders of a more famous duck.

It's clear that "Howard" was a mouthpiece for Gerber's own opinions - the cynicism of the book's later issues reflected his growing disillusionment with a corporate system which denied him any rights in his own very personal creation.

While Gerber was agonising over his situation, Canadian writer/artist Dave Sim elected to sidestep the problem by going into self-publishing. As already noted, **Cerebus** began as a parody of Marvel's barbarian comics and by now it should be clear that Sim was indeed working within a well-established tradition. Moreover, there was a political significance in his decision to parody - by publishing and owning a book which parodied a

Artwork TM & © Respective Owners

mainstream publisher's property, Sim was emphasising his right to artistic control and independence which Gerber was denied. Although Sim could not have intended it at the time, the success of **Cerebus** initiated a 'third stream' in comics publishing - the independent scene.



For pretty much the reasons outlined above, the independent companies have produced a fairly constant stream of superhero parodies since the early Eighties. In the early days many creators for the new companies had defected from DC and Marvel, lured by the promise of creators' rights, and many were happy to celebrate their freedom by parodying their former employers' property - in First's **E-Man**, for example, Marty Pasko produced the first (and most scathingly accurate) sendup of Marvel's bestselling **X-Men**. But by the middle of the decade the proliferation of independents had both brought many new creators into the field and prodded the Big Two into a circulation war in which satire and parody became weapons constantly wielded by the smaller publishers.

Far too many sendups appeared at the time to even list them all in an article this length - but some of them can be rather arbitrarily lumped together. Numerous one-shots were produced in specific response to highly publicised mainstream projects; thus DC's **Man of Steel** was answered by Blackthorne's **Man of Rust**, **Watchmen** by Harrier's **Watchcats** and **The Dark Knight** and other "Batman" specials by Mark Martin's **Gnatrat** series. Many of these were amusing but too specific to have more than a limited appeal.

Two rather more substancial series indicated a new direction by combining parody with straightforward storytelling in equal measures. Valentino's **normalman** held the reader's interest throughout a thirteen issue run by

charting the growth of its hero's self-awareness during his stay on a planet where everyone except himself is a superhero - each successive issue parodied the house style of a different comics publisher with great skill. Donald Simpson's **Megaton Man** worked in a similar but more subtle way, interweaving a genuinely touching soap opera with a grotesquely caricatured amalgam of DC and Marvel characters. Both series demonstrated the possibility implied by **Cerebus**, that parody need not be an end in itself but is capable of being used as an element of storytelling.

Which brings us back to the Turtles. The enormous success of Eastman and Laird's venture may well have set the seal on the absorption of parody and satire as a subsidiary element in comics - indeed, their decision to publish an official parody of their own book seems redundant. The independent publishers who have so far survived the current recession are doing so by licensing properties and reprinting old material rather than by criticising or sending up others. The only publisher currently producing parody in any quantity is Marvel, who are retreading ground covered by **Not Brand Echh** in **What The!** and have rehired Steve Gerber to produce a rather lacklustre re-run of **Howard the Duck** in the pages of **The Sensational She-Hulk**.

Such is the current state of affairs - for the future, who can tell? The long and erratic history of parody and satire in comics seems to have reflected changing trends in a field which is still growing and developing - whether they have moved from their clear and discrete origins to an ultimate condition as a mere story element, or whether future developments will provoke fresh outbursts remains to be seen. For now, the tradition begun by Harvey Kurtzman almost forty years ago has left us with a legacy of enjoyable and often hilarious comics which serve to remind us that we should take our superhero comics with a pinch of salt - or perhaps of powdered kryptonite!

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Channel 5 Video Distribution Ltd.

Another episode in the continuing war between prepubescent American teenagers and monsters from Hell. This time the monsters are marginally more appealing than the juveniles.

The story begins with the removal of a tree stump which reveals an unusual hole in the family garden. This hole turns out to be a gateway to Hell temporarily blocked off to the normal passage of demons and monsters.

After a series of coincidences helped by supernatural spells and rituals, the hole is reactivated by the local kids. The parents go off for the weekend leaving the kids in charge (not much new there) and a 'wild' party ensues which encourages the demons further.

Following the fairly slow start the mayhem now breaks out and there are a fair number of impressive and unusual effects with some scary moments.

The tension mounts as the evil visitors from the Gate close in on their hapless victims. The final minutes climax in a combination of horror and supernatural ritual as the young hero searches for a way to defeat the forces of darkness.

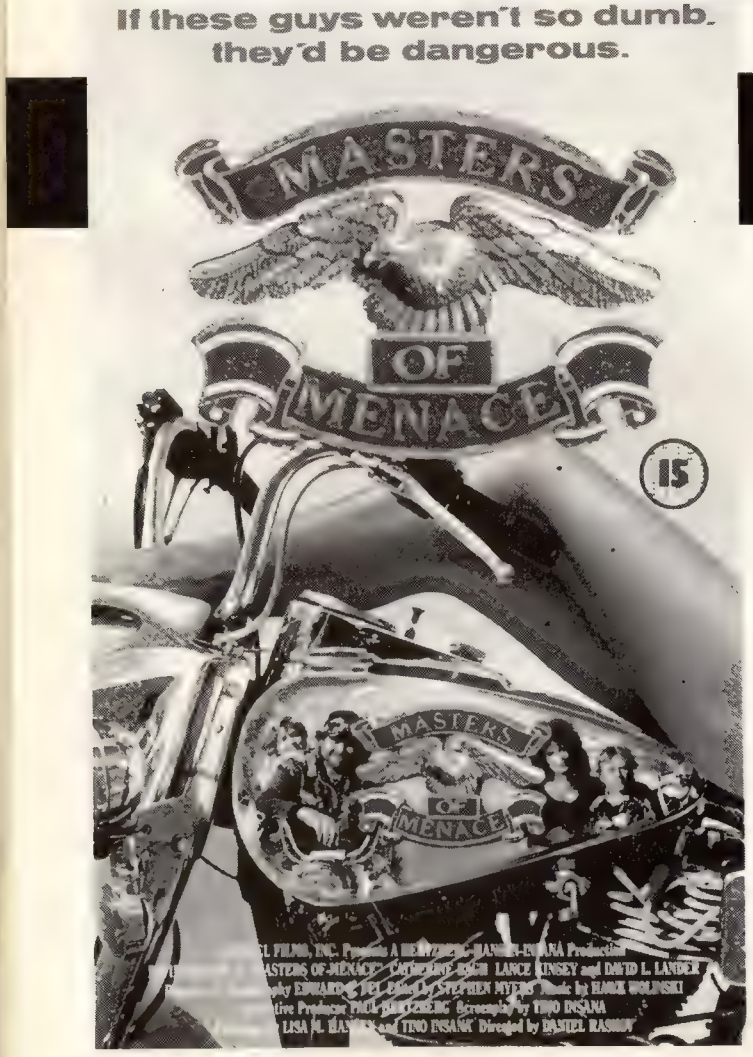
The destructive finale at least means that when the parents return all traces of the party have been obliterated. We aren't told what they say about the mess.

Marks: 6 out of 10

Running Time: 82 mins. approx.

ON SALE CHRISTMAS

Review by Tony Bowers



Vestron UK Ltd.

A classic spoof starring David Rasche (better known perhaps as "Sledgehammer" from the TV series of the same name) and Catherine Bach, plus an appearance from Dan Akroyd; this is a film well worth looking out for.

The Roadmasters are a wild group of bikers led by Buddy (David Rasche) who have just been put on a three year probation. However, when one of their number blows himself up, the brotherhood comes before gaol. Dragging their just-qualified lawyer with them, they head on out to Las Vegas to take him back to his family, partying all the way.

The fanatical D.A. Riley, determined to nail the Roadmasters to further his political career, takes the law into his own hands and leads a SWAT team after the gang.

Although a little uninspired in some places, this is a great film of its genre. Everything is featured: chase scenes, **A-Team** rip-offs, **High Noon** - it's all there and very well carried-out by the whole cast. The casting, even down to small roles, is excellent.

I cannot exactly place the attraction of this film - it doesn't set out to have you rolling in the aisles but nor does it take itself even slightly seriously. It simply leaves you with the feeling of having had a great evening's entertainment. Certainly one to watch.

Marks: 9 out of 10

Running Time: 97 mins. approx.

Release Date: 23rd January 1991

Review by Gerard Birkill

WIZARDS OF THE LOST KINGDOM

Channel 5 Video Distribution Ltd.

I expected a lot from this film having been impressed by the superb video cover illustration, but the special effects let it down. Anyway, on with the plot:

In the magical kingdom of Axeholme the benevolent King Tylor (August Larreta) is overthrown by the evil sorcerer Shurka (Thom Christopher) and the treacherous Queen Udea (Barbara Stock).

During the battle the King's faithful wizard Wulfrick (Edward Morrow) transports his son Simon (Vidal Peterson) and his magical pet Gulfax (clearly a tall bloke in a hearthrug!) from the castle to the safety of an enchanted forest. Simon is entrusted with an all powerful magic ring by his father, but during this transportation he actually manages to drop this most precious item in the castle! Shurka believes he still has it and to benefit from its magical powers he must retrieve it within two days: after that its magic fades. Consequently, he despatches his henchmen after Simon and Gulfax.

Enter our hero! Kor the Conqueror (Bo Svenson) a weatherbeaten, slightly alcoholic warrior. Together they set off to destroy the evil Shurka and free the people of Axeholme.

Weird and wonderful creatures include an army of dead warriors (here the special effects buck up momentarily!) a giant lizard man, a cyclops, a mermaid, a winged lion and an insect woman!

I have to say that kids, and a few less discerning adults I know will like it, this would certainly make a worthy Christmas present for them.

Marks: 6 out of 10

Running Time:
72 mins. approx.

ON SALE CHRISTMAS

Review by B. B.

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Cosgrove Hall Productions

By Paul H. Birch

One pictures an old stately home, perhaps adjacent to a slow running river, when considering the popular animation company, Cosgrove Hall Productions; it is in fact based in a plush converted warehouse, at Chorlton in Manchester.

COSGROVE AND HALL might be a more explanatory title: Brian Cosgrove was, and is, a producer, director, designer and animator of cartoon and model films. He worked for ITV for 9 years and in 1970 made **The Magic Ball**, his first cartoon series for television (still shown regularly around the world) it won awards at the Chicago and Venice festivals.

Producer, director, artist and animator Mark Hall, after graduating from the Manchester Regional College of Art and Design in 1957, and a period of National Service, worked in ITV for 11 years where he met Brian Cosgrove.

In 1971, the two formed an independent production company making cartoon and puppet commercials and entertainment films including Enid Blyton's **Noddy** series for ITV. Cosgrove produced and directed an animated version of the Flanders/Horowitz musical **Captain Noah and his Floating Zoo** comissioned by Granada TV, receiving critical acclaim and being chosen as ITV entry for the 1975 Prix Italia.

John Hambley was the Controller of Children's Programmes and Chairman of ITV's Children's Programme Committee. At his instigation; in 1976, was founded Cosgrove Hall Productions with Brian Cosgrove and Mark Hall as a subsidiary of Thames Television, to produce high quality British animation for the ITV network. Hambley is Chief Executive for both Cosgrove Hall and Euston Films. The three Executive Directors share the creative direction and management of the company.

As originator, animator and producer/ director, Cosgrove has been particularly associated with the model animated **Chorlton and The Wheelies** (39 episodes), the fully-animated film **The Talking Parcel** from Gerald Durrell's fantasy adventure story, the highly popular **Danger Mouse**, the BAFTA Best Short Animated Film of 1985 **Alias the Jester** (13 ten-minute cartoons) and the recent feature film **The BFG** from Roald Dahl's best selling children's book.

Hall has had similar associations with **The Pied Piper of Hamelin**, a model film of the complete Browning poem, as read by Robert Hardy. This won awards such as the Prix Jeunesse 1982, the BAFTA Best Children's Programme Award and the Red Ribbon Award at the New York International Film Festival; the model film **Cinderella** using only music and animation; **Cockleshell Bay** (104 model-animated programmes for young children); the award-winning **The Wind in the Willows**; **Count Duckula**; the 36-minute model animation film **The Reluctant Dragon**, transmitted Christmas 1987 (winning a 1987 BAFTA Award, and a Prix Danube Award in 1989); **The Creepy Crawlies** (as narrated by Paul Nicholas) and **The BFG**.

Other Cosgrove Hall Productions since 1976 have been **Jamie and The Magic Torch** (39 programmes); a series of short animated films for 'The Kenny Everett Video Show', **Captain Kremmen**; **Grandma Bricks** and **Lines and Shapes**, short films for the pre-school series 'Rainbow'; and **Oh! Mr. Toad**, a 60- minute special and 13 20-minute programmes.

Cosgrove Hall Productions was essentially a northern company, the studio being set up with the intention of employing people from the surrounding area, as previous to this most were based in London, and those studios existing outside would soak up London talent. Originally a lot of the projects' voices used local accents and dialects.

Suave, debonair and incredibly brave - a curious way to describe a rodent, but in the case of **Danger Mouse** one both the young in heart and age can make an exception for. Televised during the children's slot, adults can revel in the subtlety of wit, and shrewd references written in by series writer, Brian Trueman.

With David Jason supplying Danger Mouse's voice, the "world's greatest secret agent" prevents assorted villains in their attempts to take over the world, none more so than the heinous toad, Baron Greenback (voice by Edward Kelsey). And lest we forget, there is always Penfold, the faithful but often hindering assistant, with a wonderfully ironic tone of voice supplied by Terry Scott.

Danger Mouse has proved highly popular abroad, selling to over 50 countries, an intriguing aspect considering how much of a 'British' flavour the cartoon series makes use of. It is the first British cartoon to be syndicated coast-to-coast in the U.S.A., where it can be seen on the cable channel, Nickelodeon.

Marvin Kitman of the New York 'Newsday' said: "**Danger Mouse** is not just a cartoon show. It's a way of life, a religion. **Danger Mouse** has been elevated to the status of cult figure."

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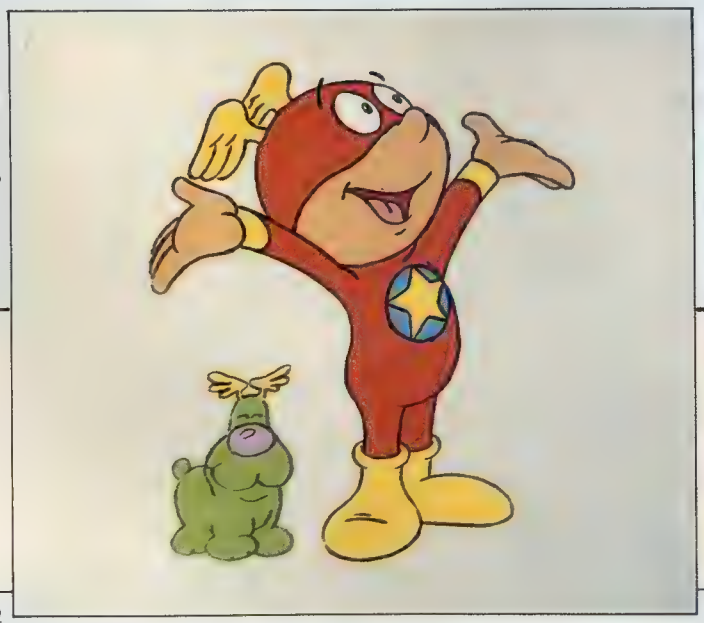
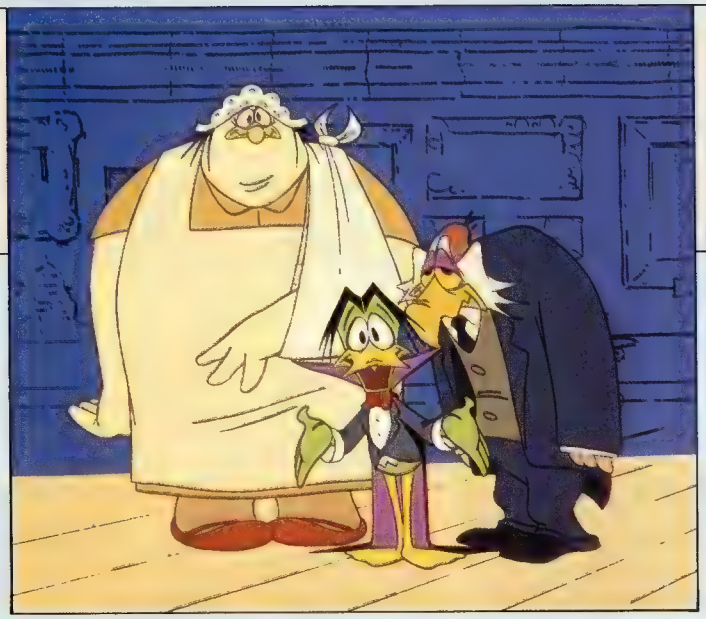


Alias the Jester

Danger Mouse

Count Duckula



Cockleshell Bay

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In Britain there were originally 90 5-minute cartoons, then 52 lasting 10 minutes, 8 30-minutes, and a new set of 13 30-minute episodes are currently in production. Each half-hour episode takes approximately 8 weeks to produce. The earlier **Danger Mouse** cartoons were coloured in pastels applied with cotton wool to give an airbrush feel, thus retaining a line, leaving it with much more than a block of colour. The colour designers appear enthusiastic about the look of the new series, described as keeping the feel of the style already established but now looking 'slicker'.

Taking advantage of my friendship with former comic artist Jez Hall, now working for Cosgrove Hall Productions, I swung myself an invite to visit the studios. On entering the building one is greeted by a friendly receptionist, large models of Count Duckula and the like, and cabinets displaying various awards proudly.

As Jez explained, when a series is commissioned all the characters, props and situations are designed, and when a script is approved by the directors it is given to the storyboard department.

Paul Salmon showed me various sketches he had prepared for the design of Castle Duckula and explained the process from idea to end result. "The actual castle came from a combination of the various sketches. We decided to use the turret from one. There were different ideas, some considered too ginger-bread - Really you can go on forever expanding and putting bits on. We made a model, got a chap in who built a cardboard facsimile so we could view the castle from all angles. It took some drawing!" How long would it take to do an initial sketch? "You're talking about a week just to do this by doodling. We did other sketches as well, trying all sorts of views to achieve the look."

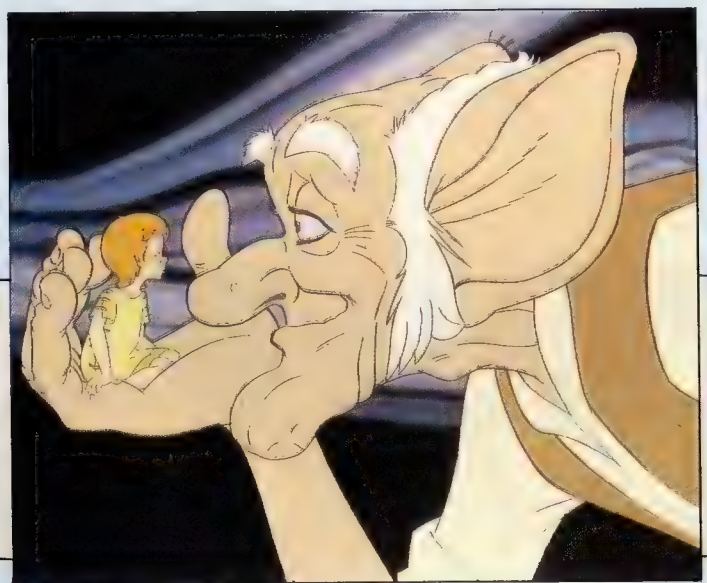
Count Duckula began transmission on the full ITV network in September 1988. David Jason again supplied the lead character's voice, with Jack May as Igor, Brian Trueman as Nanny and Jimmy Hibbert as Dr. Van Goosewing. Trueman and Hibbert along with Peter Richard Reeves wrote the scripts.

The story goes that, amidst the Transylvanian Alps on a jagged rock, stands the dark and looming form of Castle Duckula, home for many centuries to an unbroken line of fearsome vampires.

The current Count Duckula, however, has broken with tradition. As if forsaking vampirism wasn't enough, he has become ... a vegetarian. Try as he might, the aged manservant Igor can not persuade the Count to "mend his ways". Still, the muddle-headed housekeeper Nanny makes sure her "Duckyboos" always has a nice clean vest.

The Castle Duckula has the supernatural ability to transport itself and occupants within under the order of the Count, to any place in the world. Regretably for the Vampire Vegetarian Duck, his constant search for fame, fortune and fun are often interrupted by the built-in, fail-safe time device of the Castle, so that it will always return home at dawn, by Eastern Transylvanian Standard time.

In the pre-production studio, Andrew Roper revealed "We really do everything as far as the technical side of setting scenes is concerned. Somebody goes through the script and works out what we will need, props list, characters, scenes like a picture of Scotland Yard which would probably just be used as a background, one-off establishing shot. We do all the character sheets up here as well. When you've got characters in the film you need scale relationships, especially to send out to animators abroad. Again all the colour styling is prepared here - We do all the elaborate



The BFG

The Reluctant Dragon

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Cosgrove Hall Productions

layout side of things which will involve the camera." Can designing props all day become tedious? "Not really, because one morning you can be drawing a windmill and in the afternoon an aircraft carrier - You're always doing something different, even if it's just a spanner! In fact the biggest challenge is when the scene is very wordy, the director will come up to you and say 'We want to do this so try and give it a good angle'. Sometimes we re-use old backgrounds. You have to pay attention to economy today, because when your company spills out, you can go a bit overboard and say we'll have so many effects, like a room with paintings on the walls - You have to be economical so you can re-use them."

With long-running series such as **Danger Mouse** and **Count Duckula** this is obviously the case, but with new projects such as **Victor and Hugo**? "Because the backgrounds are very 'painted' you can't really use a lot of stuff from the other previous series, but as you do one series you normally gain stuff you can use, with the basic designs already being done." Like many working for the company, Andy Roper has previously been involved in comics, in his case such titles as **Brain Damage** and **Oink!**.

The stock shots that can be re-used are prepared initially. The layouts which are a stage between storyboards and animation are sketches with different poses for the animator to develop further. Indicated matching lines are made to inform where the animation will interact with the background, as the moving character and background are worked on independently. As Maggie Riley who develops background styles for new series explained, "I go through the film, work out the establishing shots and develop it from there. Sometimes you have matchlines to key in the backgrounds and the large picture will be panned and tracked around."

The background colourists tighten the work up, with the colour pre-chosen their task is to add to the flow and feel of the piece. The colours are chosen in such a way as to not detract from the characters who will eventually be seen in motion.

An example was shown from a new series where a car will eventually be seen motoring over a desert landscape. The animators at this point would be working on the car, and a third team, the special effects development, would create the smoke from the exhaust of the vehicle. In this case the background colourists will try and create a darker atmosphere to give precedence to the white smoke of the moving car.

There are large files of material containing storyboards, scripts, tapes of dialogue, colours etc; all catalogued and numbered - These will be sent to outside animators in countries such as Spain and Argentina to work on.

The Animators room is an open-planned office where the artists quietly beaver about at their work. They work with 'Dope Sheets' which will later be used by the Cameraman to shoot the scene.

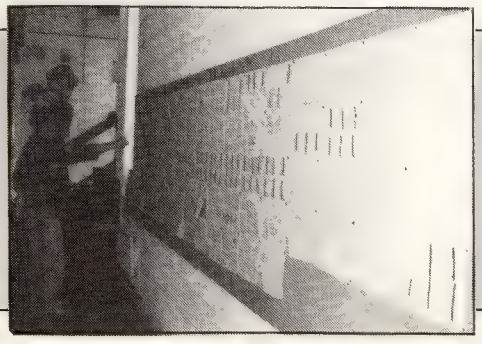
The sheet breaks the scene down in time, each one a 'break' with 25 of these parts equivalent to one second. As an animator working on a new series explained, "We get a scene and blank dope sheets. We use the bottom levels for the backgrounds, the next level in this case will be a car, then the individual characters will be on seperate levels also - They will then more or less stay in the same dope sheet columns all the way down. Things are mapped out by the director indicating where she wants things shot, and in what amount of time a character will need to get out of shot and when to shoot back in. In rough form this will be tested to see if the timing is right." An important part of timing is lip-synchronising, an aspect which most viewers will take for granted as there are distinct mouth positions for each vowel.

An animator has in the region of 20-30 scenes to key-out in the space of 4 weeks. These are then passed on to the assistants who do the drawing required in between the key poses, and make the rough drawings which emphasise the movement fall into line with the characterisations presented on the model sheets.

These rough animation sections are tried out on a line-tester: the drawings are copied in sequence and a computer system will enact the resultant work. Usually 2 frames of each drawing are taken, this saves drawing time, except in detailed work where single frames are needed. The line-tester can show how the animation would look speeded-up or slowed-down. At Cosgrove Hall there are 2 line-testers and one that can put all the various pieces together.

Once the work is cleaned up it is taken to the Xerox department. The work is copied onto cels, the main ones of which will be painted. The principle is the same as most photocopying processes, except that it runs cold to avoid melting the cels. From AO sheets downwards, rolls of paper or transparent sheets for the cels can be 150m. long. It is transferred to a light-sensitive drum on the inside, and using mirrors and lenses the machine senses where and when the image ends and cuts it off accordingly. Before the use of the Xerox, artists would have the laborious task of inking each cel with rotrings and having to wait for the ink to dry.

In the colouring department, a man jokingly described himself as 'The Grim Reaper': "I check through the work. In this case if any of the colours are wrong or details missed off, or holes in the page where light might show up which could cause a flash if it was back-lit. Mostly I check the drawn work before it's xeroxed. Go over work lines, refer work against dope sheets checking for field sizes and pan rates. If anything needs to be corrected I'm the one who takes it back." Describing the work of the rest of the studio, "They actually paint the cels. Basically the darker colours are put down first, so that if the lighter colours run into the dark, it doesn't matter. Once a colour is done it is left for about 20 minutes to dry before another colour is applied." If done too quickly the colour would crack and blemish. It is an emulsion-type paint with an elastic quality. The colours are flooded as brush strokes are unwanted. It is not as easy a job as it might initially sound, as the paint has to be pushed but kept within the line. White gloves are worn to avoid perspiration staining the cels. The majority of the colourists were females. Statistics show 1 in 3 males are



Cosgrove Hall Productions

Count Duckula *© & TM Cosgrove Hall Productions*

colour-blind, but in a place such as Cosgrove Hall, one can only put it down to talent. All the paint tins are labelled in code such as DM nose, which is the colour of Danger Mouse's nose and tongue.

Walking down a long hall one witnessed layouts spread along both walls. As each scene is filmed, the cameraman will mark the frame as such.

There are 4 special rostrum cameras for the use of filming. 16mm movie film is used, except in the case of feature films such as **The BFG** which uses 35mm and title sequences which are then printed down. Controlled by a computer, the bed on which the animation lies can be moved anywhere and the cameras can track up and down and make cross-scene mixes. The computer is programmed to do special effects. As was explained, "If there's a watercycle for instance, what you would normally do is have cels of a character with the legs and arms in about 6 different positions. We have 2 frames for each one, and actually drag the backgrounds through underneath. The computer controls the motor, so it can be stopped at any time. It works out the distance and number of frames so its increment is exact - We used to have to do that by hand, so it's a really great timesaver!" The dope sheet with instructions from the animator has details for up to a maximum of six levels, each one of these being a frame of film.

Being filmed were 64 frames, which will be virtually 3 seconds of running time. This whole process taking about an hour to complete. The filming is an eye-opening sight to behold.

Up on the animators floor is a preview theatre where the films can be seen in progress on video.

On the lower level are enormous theatres where puppet animation is filmed. It has not been unknown for a whole corridor to be set with things at different levels, and a camera to pan down the whole room. The cost of production to launch model pilots is immense and so the drawn animation films can often assist in financing them.

Each model is sculpted initially, then a brass skeleton is made that will allow the joints of the figure to move independently. A latex mold is made from a special plasticene and then casts are made.

The model animation series **The Wind in the Willows** is fondly remembered for its fine craftsmanship. Those adventures of Toad, Ratty, Mole and Badger around the countryside and riverbanks of Edwardian England won an International Emmy Award and a BAFTA award in 1983.

Using the meticulous and time-consuming process of stop-frame animation, the series displayed precise attention to detail - The Willow pattern crockery at Mole End is scaled down to a half-inch diameter, Ratty's jumpers were made from men's socks, even some of Badger's thumbnail-size books are readable!

All props, costumes and models (which stand about 9" tall) are made in-house. Enthusiastic craftsmen, the envy of many as they build perfect vintage Rolls or miniscule strawberry tarts.

Excellent voices were supplied by Sir Michael Hordern (Badger), Richard Pearson (Mole), Peter Sallis (Rat) and David Jason as the irrepressible Toad. Directed by Chris Taylor, Jackie Cockle, Frank Vose and Brian Little after a 75-minute initial film, four series of 13 20-minute episodes were made taking 8 weeks each to make. The series is currently shown on the US Disney channel.

Cosgrove Hall Productions, amongst their many projects in production, have a 90-minute model animation film for transmission on the ITV network during Christmas 1990 titled **Fool of the World and The Flying Ship**.

Whilst Cosgrove Hall Productions is a subsidiary of Thames Television PLC, similar to Euston Films it is allowed to work on independent work, such as branching out into America. Syndication is actually very popular in Europe, and **Danger Mouse** has even been translated into Japanese.

The Cosgrove Hall staff work solely on the animation projects in-house, certain cartoon animation work being comissioned abroad. A few free-lancers work for the company, but in the case of merchandising, this is done externally, such as the license given to London Editions Magazines to publish comics.

Many projects are always being worked on, but pilot films must be accepted before work on a series can be undertaken. **Victor and Hugo**, who have the tag 'Bunglers in Crime' is one such. Each episode will last 20-minutes, with David Jason, Jimmy Hibbert and Brian Trueman supplying voices.

It was with a depth of sadness on returning home from an enlightening and entertaining day in Manchester that I learnt of the death of Roald Dahl.

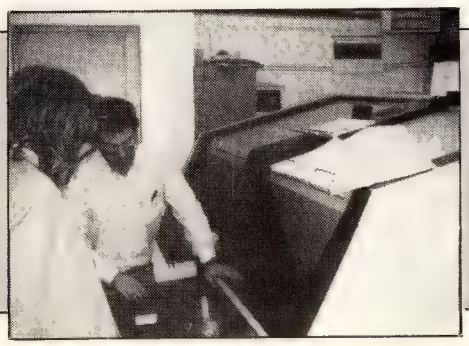
Dahl's **The BFG** topped the children's best-seller lists in 1984 and was adapted into a full-length 90-minute fully-animated feature film by Cosgrove Hall Productions, and transmitted on the ITV network on Christmas Day 1989.

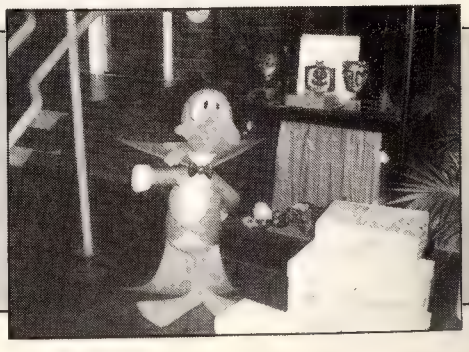
In the film, The BFG (The Big Friendly Giant) snatches Sophie, a little girl, from her bed one night, and thus begins a startling, funny, exciting adventure in the inimitable style that was Roald Dahl's.

A cast of renowned actors such as David Jason, Don Henderson, Mollie Sugden, Angela Thorne, Frank Thornton, Amanda Root, Michael Knowles and Ballard Berkely can be heard giving speech to the animations.

Malcom Rowe and Keith Hopwood composed the music, as they had previously for **The Wind in the Willows**. Brian Cosgrove directed, Mark Hall was producer and John Hambley was executive producer. The video sales of **The BFG** are said to be progressing well.

If, like me, you are ever daunted by the financial, political and social situations and times we live in, one only has to look to Cosgrove Hall Productions to see just what it is that allows Britain the prefix of Great.





"Fantasia' is timeless. It may run 10, 20 or 30 years. It may run after I am gone. 'Fantasia' is an idea in itself. I can never build another 'Fantasia'. I can improve. I can elaborate. That's all." Walt Disney
WALT DISNEY'S
50TH
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WALT DISNEY'S "FANTASIA" WITH LEOPOLD STOKOWSKI AND THE PHILADELPHIA ORCHESTRA

WALT DISNEY'S CLASSIC
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After 50 years, Walt Disney's animated classic 'Fantasia' may have exceeded even the expectations of its creators, but time has not diminished the impact of this daring, innovative and universally-appealing motion picture. In celebration of its golden anniversary, this landmark film has undergone a complete restoration of its original negative and soundtrack allowing moviegoers all over the world to see and hear it as they never have before and preserving this experience for generations to come.

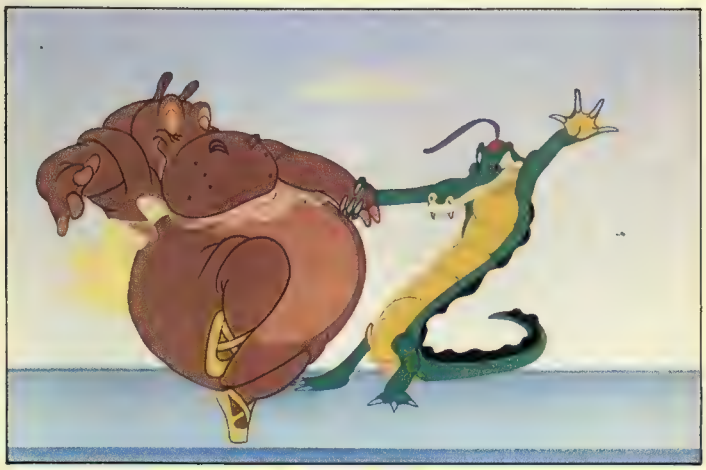
THE restoration, part of Disney's ongoing commitment to preserving its film heritage, was completed over a two-year period, utilising the latest technology along with the talents and experience of the leading experts in the field. For the first time since the mid 1940's, new prints have been struck from the original nitrate negative, with improved fine grain film emulsions and precision lenses used to create a richer, sharper, more colourful **Fantasia** than even the original. Disney's resident sound wizard Terry Porter studied Stokowski's hand-written guide sheets to recreate and reprocess a form of "Fantasound" for today's modern equipment. The restored version of **Fantasia** will be exhibited as originally conceived in its "square screen" 1.33:1 format only.

Artistically, **Fantasia** represents one of the greatest collaborations in motion picture history. Leopold Stokowski and the Philadelphia Orchestra joined forces with Walt Disney and his team of top talents to create a form of motion picture entertainment that was unlike any that preceeded it. With eight diverse pieces of classical music selected for the programme, Disney and his storymen and artists took on the challenge of finding the appropriate images. Their goal was to create music you could see and pictures you could hear.

From a technology standpoint, **Fantasia** also broke new ground. It was the very first motion picture to use stereophonic sound. The film's revolutionary "Fantasound" soundtrack and playback system was an outgrowth of Stokowski's dedication to the improvement of recorded sound and his desire to create a synthesis between sound and picture by having the music follow the animated images as they move around the screen. In Walt Disney, he found a pioneering kindred spirit and the studio's sound department, led by William E. Garity, rose to the challenge.

In 1942, Disney was presented with a special technical Academy Award for "outstanding contribution to the advancement of the use of sound in motion pictures through the production of **Fantasia**." That same year, Stokowski and his associates also received a special award from the Academy for their achievement "in the creation of a new form of visualised music."

Among **Fantasia**'s many other advancements was its extraordinary use



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of colour and special effects. In many ways the film relies as much on effects animation as it does on actual character animation and Disney's effects team invented new ways to draw and photograph myriad illusions that the film required. For the film's stunning "Ave Maria" finale, the layout and camera departments created a horizontal version of the multiplane camera to photograph the longest continual scene in animation history in a fully-dimensional way.

Fantasia took three years to complete and used the talents of 1000 artists and technicians at the Disney Studios in addition to Stokowski's "100-man" orchestra. What had started ostensibly as a 10-minute animated "special" to infuse new life into the career of Mickey Mouse had evolved into an expensive "concert feature" with a final price tag of $2,280,000.

When at last the film was completed, theatre owners balked at the film's highbrow content and the enormous cost of installing special "Fantasound" equipment. The latter included up to 96 additional speakers in some situations, which ran anywhere from $30,000 to $85,000.

In the end, Disney had to rent or "four-wall" most of the 14 theatres in which **Fantasia** played during its initial 1940-41 roadshow engagements. Twelve of those theatres were legitimate stage houses which required the installation of a projection booth and equipment. Only in New York and Los Angeles did the film initially play in actual movie theatres.

Fantasia officially premiered on November 13th, 1940 at the Broadway Theater in New York City - the same theatre, under its former name of the Colony, where Mickey Mouse made his debut in "Steamboat Willie" twelve years earlier. Nearly two and a half tons of Fantasound equipment were installed and the projection booth was enlarged to nearly four times its size to accomodate the film's special requirements. Getting the film ready for the New York premiere produced more anxious moments. The closing scene and the entire last reel of soundtrack arrived just four hours before showtime.

"Motion picture history was made last night," proclaimed Bosley Crowther in **The New York Times**. He praised **Fantasia** as a film that "dumps conventional formulas overboard and reveals the scope of films for imaginative excursions... **Fantasia** ...is simply terrific".

Look Magazine called it "a masterpiece" and stated that "Disney revolutionises movies again".

For the most part, reaction from the film, art and dance critics was extremely favourable and even those who expressed reservations found much to admire about Disney's experiment. Many music critics were not so kind, however, and complained about Stokowski's edited versions and Disney's visual interpretations.

The public reaction was overwhelmingly positive and in New York, **Fantasia** broke house records by running for a year. But ultimately, the film failed to turn a profit in its initial release because of the expenses associated with its elaborate roadshow presentation and the loss of foriegn revenues due to the war in Europe.

In 1942, Fantasound was abandoned and the film was slashed from its original 124-minute running time down to 81 minutes, and relegated to a double bill with KO's "Valley of the Sun". Four years later, a two-hour "popular version" of **Fantasia**

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was released.

In 1955, **Fantasia**'s aging original soundtrack, which had been recorded on optical nitrate film, was tranferred onto four-track magnetic stereo film approximating the original Fantasound mix. The film's popularity grew with that re-release, but it wasn't until its 1969 reissue that it became profitable for the first time. Embraced by young audiences of the psychedelic generation, **Fantasia** finally gained wide acceptance.

In 1982, **Fantasia** once again proved to be on the cutting edge of sound technology as it became the first film soundtrack to be recorded in digital Dolby stereo. Academy Award-winner Irwin Kostal and an orchestra comprised of Hollywood's leading musicians, re-recorded the original score in an effort to give new clarity and dimension to the musical performance.

Today, fifty years after its original release, audiences will be able to see and hear **Fantasia** as it was originally intended. New technology has made it possible to once again use Stokowski's own recordings and to bring the sound quality up to today's standards of excellence. The restored picture content is clearer, sharper and more vibrant than even the original. To paraphrase Walt Disney himself, it may be possible to improve or elaborate on the original, but they can never build another **Fantasia**.

Walt Disney recognised the important role that music played in animation from the dawn of sound. By 1929, he had created his "Silly Symphony" series to experiment with the interaction of these two art forms. A crude, but imaginative black-and-white cartoon called "The Skeleton Dance" was the first in this popular, critically acclaimed series. Subsequent efforts used original compositions and ocassionally classical music to highlight and, in some cases, dictate the action.

By 1937, as the studio was putting the finishing touches on its first full-length animated feature, "Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs", Disney was already looking to "the great music of all times" to open up animation to "unlimited possibilities". A chance meeting with Leopold Stokowski, the renowned symphonic conductor for the world famous Philadelphia Orchestra since 1912, provided the catalyst.

The two men met at Chasen's, a famous Beverly Hills restaurant, sometime in 1937. As Stokowski recalled years later, "I was alone having dinner at a table near him (Disney) and he called across to me, 'Why don't we sit together?' Then he began to tell me he was interested in Dukas' 'The Sorcerer's Apprentice' as a possible short, and did I like the music. I said I liked it very much and would be happy to cooperate with him."

Immediately, Disney set to work on the project. He described "The Sorcerer's Apprentice" to his staff as "a musical fantasy offering an opportunity for a new type of entertainment". "The picture will be made without dialogue and without sound effects, depending solely on pantomime and the descriptive music," he instructed. "Please avoid slapstick gags in the ordinary sense; work instead toward fantasy and business with an imaginative touch..."

Walt argued successfully that Mickey Mouse was the ideal choice for the role since he was a character that everyone could relate to. It would also give a boost to Mickey's career which had lately been eclipsed by the growing popularity of Donald Duck.

Stokowski assembled a hand-picked group of studio musicians and recorded the music for "The Sorcerer's Apprentice" in Los Angeles, January 10th 1938.

As work progressed on the project, Roy O. Disney, Walt's brother and the financial genius behind the studio's operations, became alarmed by its skyrocketing budget. This two-reel "cartoon" was costing $125,000, or nearly four times that of a regular "Silly Symphony". It was at this point that Walt sold his brother on the idea of turning this project into a "concert feature" comprised of a group of seperate numbers.

Stokowski was delighted with Disney's concept and enthusiastically agreed to work with him. In September 1938, the two collaborators were joined by Deems Taylor, a noted composer, music critic and radio personality; Joe Grant, head of the studio's character model department and Dick Huemer, a Disney animator/director, for a three-week conference to decide which musical selections should be included on the program. Hundreds of compositions were played before the eight finalists were chosen. A ninth election, Debussy's "Clair de Lune" was originally set for the program but eliminated due to time considerations. Rough animation was completed and the piece was subsequently included in "Make Mine Music" (1946) with the music "Blue Bayou" replacing Debussy.

According to John Culhane in his definitive book on the film, **Walt Disney's Fantasia** (Henry N. Abrams; 1983), it was Stokowski who gave the project its name. Fantasia is a musical term for a composition in a fanciful or irregular form or style. It seemed to say it all.

The ideas for the visuals grew out of numerous story meetings between Disney, his two overall story directors, Joe Grant and Dick Huemer, and the directors, storymen and animators assigned to each individual segment.

In the case of Ponchielli's "Dance of the Hours", Disney himself outlined the action at the very first story meeting. The composer wrote his music to express a pageant of the hours of the day. According to a meeting transcript, Disney suggested, "Dawn is the ostrich; Day would be, say, the hippos; Evening, the elephants; Night, the crocodiles. Then when they chase off the Hours of the Night, let them all come in because that's the finale." The action evolved from that basic concept with the director, layout artists and animators embellishing all the way.

Much of the detailed design work for "Dance of the Hours" came from layout artist Kendall O'Connor. "We adopted a linear motif for each sequence.," explained O'Connor in Culhane's book. "In the first sequence our motif was vertical and horizontal in design. This tied in with the vertical necks and legs of the ostriches and, as far as possible, the birds were kept moving horizontally and vertically. It also expressed the static calm of early morning hours, which was further emphasised by cool, grayed colours in the backgrounds and neutrals in the characters."

For "Ave Maria", story director Joe Grant drew inspiration from his own backyard. "The trees in my yard had a Gothic form, which gave me the idea for the cathedral look," said Grant. Famed Danish illustrator Kay Nielsen took this concept and solidified the look for the film.

The story for "Night on Bald Mountain" was set by composer Mussorgsky's tone poem. It took the imagination and amazing talent of animation supervisor Vladimir "Bill" Tytla to bring this segment alive. Working from inspirational sketches of Chernabog, the god of evil and death, created by Albert Hurter and Kay Nielsen, Tytla went on to animate what many today still consider to be some of the greatest artistry ever captured on screen. His work on this and other Disney films earned him the admiration of his fellow artists and he is often credited with being the first to achieve strong emotions and convincing acting with the human form. Tytla's animation of Chernabog is as powerful and dramatic as anything ever done in animation.

Once it was decided to cast Mickey in the role of "The Sorcerer's Apprentice", the story began to come together quickly. Storyman Carl Fallberg remembered, "The basic plot was pretty well established by the Goethe fable so it became our challenge to adapt it to Mickey's personality and dream up animation gags within the strict confines of the music. The music itself did a beautiful job of story-telling and you could see everything happening practically with each note. It has real drama and suspense."

Mickey's performance in "The Sorcerer's Apprentice" was helped immeasurably by his new-and-improved eye design. Working from a rough sketch by animator Ward Kimball, "Mickey expert" Fred Moore created a new model sheet for the studio's top star which gave him real pupils for the first time instead of black "shoe button" eyes. This gave Mickey a wider range of emotion and expression

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than was ever possible before.

The 50th anniversary version of **Fantasia** represents one of the most extensive restoration efforts in motion picture history. It ranks alongside "Becky Sharp" (a landmark 1935 film which was the first to be shot in 3-strip Technicolour) and exceeds "Gone With the Wind" in terms of the complexity of the work required. The Walt Disney Studios is committed to preserving all the films in its library and is continuing to lead the industry with its ambitious resoration program.

From a visual standpoint, restoration meant finding as much of the original nitrate camera negative as possible. Disney's veteran technical manager Leon Briggs led the effort on this front. Because **Fantasia** had existed in many different versions over the years, the search for these original elements required patience and some ingenious detective work. The film's numerous optical effects such as dissolves and live-action composites had been printed for decades from dupes, and finding original material for these scenes was particularly difficult. The entire process was like a giant jigsaw puzzle.

Helping Briggs in his mission was YCM Labs of Burbank, one of the industry's top speciality labs whose restoration credits include "Gone With the Wind" itself, and hundreds of other feature films for the UCLA Film Archives, Disney and many other studios. Pete Comandini, vice president of engineering for YCM was responsible for colour-timing and hand-cleaning the original negative. His partners, Richard Dayton and Don Hagans, oversaw the research phase and negative repair work, respectively.

Complicating the picture restoration was the fact that the live-action and animation components for **Fantasia** were shot in two entirely different formats. The animated segments were filmed using a successive exposure technique where every image was photographed three times in successive yellow, cyan and magenta exposed frames on the same strip of film. The live-action was photographed using the three-strip Technicolour process.

Once the original elements were in place, YCM began the actual restoration process. The 1946 "popular version" of the film served as a guide in conforming the restored version. Ninety percent of the latter was printed from the original negative for the first time since the mid-1940's. Editor John Carnochan ("The Little Mermaid") helped to standardise this anniversary version with the primary deletion (from the 1940 original) being in the live-action intermission segment.

Overseeing the project from Disney's feature animation department was Tim Hauser, who supervised the restoration from a historical and artistic standpoint.

"We looked at the prints of **Fantasia** that had been released in the 1980's and we weren't too happy with what we saw," recalled Comandini. "The colour was desaturated and very much on the blue-green side. There was no richness in it, no deep blacks, no bright whites."

YCM Labs spent two years in all restoring the picture with Comandini meticulously examining the original negative and polishing it frame-by-frame. Microsurgery with razor blades was required in some cases to remove dirt which had been imbedded over the years.

"The result is a vastly-improved picture with greater colour-saturation, contrast and sharpness," said Comandini. "With the new fine grain film emulsions and precision lenses, you'll be able to see subtleties, details and gradations of colour that weren't even visible in the original 1940 prints."

While Briggs and YCM were working on the picture, Disney's resident Academy Award-nominated sound re-recording mixer Terry Porter was unraveling the mysteries of "Fantasound" and deciding on the optimum way to restore the soundtrack for today's sound systems. The more he learned about the film's innovative approach to sound the more impressed he became.

"What they did fifty years ago was absolutely amazing," said Porter. "They said let's do something about mono sound so they designed a left-centre-right system with a surround track to give the acoustical feeling of a concert hall. That's today's philosophy. We are doing essentially the same thing today only the technology is more advanced. They started from scratch and what they achieved on the **Fantasia** track in terms of placing the music was incredible."

The source material Porter and his partner, Mel Metcalfe, had to work with was a 1955 magnetic film transfer from the original optical nitrate tracks. Even if the latter still existed, there is no longer any projection equipment that could read the specially-encoded Fantasound information. As Porter examined the 1955 soundtrack he found something very unusual.

"We learned that the 1955 transfer from optical nitrate to magnetic film was done over a telephone line," explained Porter. "The RCA facility in Hollywood was the only place where the Fantasound track could still be played so they patched it through to the Disney Studios in Burbank by phone. This helped to explain a hum that we kept hearing on the soundtrack in all its previous releases."

After one solid year of researching Fantasound and studying volumes of technical manuals and Stokowski's hand-written guide tracks, Porter was ready to begin. His biggest challenge throughout was to be faithful to the original soundtrack and avoid cleaning the tracks to the extent that it could actually hurt the final product.

Using all the conventional tricks of his trade, the latest technological innovations and his own "sound" judgement, Porter went through the film a track at a time. During the initial phase, the tracks were cleaned and more than 3,000 optical pops and snaps were removed along with the hum from the phone transfer. In subsequent phases, the hiss level was refined, further noise reduction was completed and equalisation was added to bring a consistent level between the reels. The actual sound restoration was completed over a three-month period.

Porter did all his work in the main theatre at the Walt Disney Studios, which was where **Fantasia** was originally mixed in 1940.

According to Porter, "One of the best tools in restoring this film was my own ear. Instead of sitting in a tiny little room staring at graphs and meters, I took the theatre approach and tried to listen to it as if I were the viewing audience. I put an emphasis on how it would play with an audience in the real world."

Aside from the standard soundtracks for 35mm (four-track Dolby stereo) and 70mm prints (six-track Dolby stereo), Porter got a chance to experiment with "Fantasound 90", a new process for select 70mm engagements which uses three discrete surround channels (compared to mono surround on regular 70mm prints) to approximate the experience of the 1940 roadshow version.

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IN Berlin in the early 1990's, the mounting pressures of urban life are reflected in a relentlessly rising suicide rate. One autumn morning, a young artist throws herself under a subway train; a truck crosses from East to West and crashes into a row of rail tankers carrying dangerous chemicals, releasing a deadly cloud of toxic gas over the city; and a prominent television personality sets fire to his apartment block before killing himself in his swimming pool.

Klaus Hartmann (Jan Niklas), the police detective in charge of the investigations, makes a connection between the deaths and Sonja Vogler (Jennifer Beals), an American model whose smiling face looks down from a thousand video advertising screens. Ostensibly her slogan, "time to go", refers to the Theratos vacation club, which she promotes as an alluring respite from stress, pollution and bad weather, but Hartmann believes it has more sinister implications.

He discovers that Sonja's most regular haunt is Extinction!, a disco where alienated young people dance like robots without contact between bodies or minds. Like Club Theratos, it is part of the Matermedia corporation, a conglomerate which is controlled by the mysterious Marsfeldt (Alan Bates). From his laboratory within the disco, literally the heart of his operation, the media tycoon uses sophisticated electronics to run the organisation that dominates the lives of the stressed citizens.

Brought together by loneliness and fear, Hartmann and Sonja become lovers. While on holiday together with Theratos, they discover some sinister secrets about indoctrination procedures within the Club and they hurry back to Berlin. They arrive just in time to engage in a desperate battle for survival as the deadline for mass suicide approaches.

Dr. M is a Claude Chabrol thriller about alienation and manipulation in a modern urban environment. Conceived as a tribute to Fritz Lang, it is set in Berlin, the city that produced some of his greatest work, most notably his four seminal Expressionist films: **Dr. Mabuse, The Gambler, M, The Testament of Dr. Mabuse,** and **The Thousand Eyes of Dr. Mabuse**. Chabrol's Marsfeldt is inspired by Mabuse, but the French director has updated the imagery to make it relevant to the 1990's. Where Mabuse favoured hypnosis as a means of imposing his subliminal demands on his victims, Marsfeldt employs television and video, seductive, repetitious and dominating, to bend people to his will.

In **Dr. M**, Berlin is used as a microcosm for a much more far reaching malaise. Split by ideology and isolated within artificial frontiers, it is a particularly effective metaphor for the chaos that affects inner cities worldwide. As the 20th Century nears its end, power is divided unevenly between three key factions who do not necessarily share the same aims. Elected politicians habitually put personal and party popularity before the interests of the people; police forces tend to believe that law and order are more important than justice; both are uneasily dependent on increasingly unscrupulous media.

These factors are reflected in a sophisticated plot in which neither the authorities nor the police have the means to prevent the inexplicable suicide epidemic sweeping through the city. Shooting on **Dr. M** began in October, 1989, a month before the Wall was opened, and continued through the euphoria of November 9th. As there is already free access between East and West in the Berlin described in the screenplay, the film became rather prophetic as the cameras rolled.

DR. M

The collaboration between Claude Chabrol and the Munich-based French producer, Francois Duplat, on **Dr. M** began three years ago. When Duplat, a friend and admirer of Chabrol's since their initial meeting in 1967, proposed a tribute to Fritz Lang, the French director was quick to agree.

The original story was written in German by Thomas Bauermeister. As a resident of Berlin, he was able to shape his own perspectives to the strengths of both Fritz Lang and Claude Chabrol. "A homage to Lang must be a mirror of the present or the immediate future, not of his time. I didn't want to write just another European co-production. It was important to reflect the objective viewpoint that Chabrol shares with Germany and also the claustrophobia, the way the architecture of a city can overwhelm the people who live in it, which Lang expressed so well in **Metropolis**."

The English screenplay was written by Sollace Mitchell, an American fan of Fritz Lang's German films. His thesis is that the Wall is a division not just between East and West Berlin, but between life and death. "My thinking developed along Freudian lines, the conflict between the erotic drive which leads to chaos and the death drive which leads to eternal peace. Dr. M is looking for perfection in the human condition. The nearest earthly approximation is beauty which is why he is obsessed with Sonja, but the only complete beauty is death. I see him as a benevolent undertaker who satisfies the universal yearning for death."

In Mitchell's script, death is the ultimate vacation, one of the ironies being that the travellers who return from the compulsory relaxation procedures at Dr. M's holiday clubs have lost their fear of mortality and so are more amenable to his suggestions. The subtext also makes connections between the suicide virus and AIDS, parallel factors that drive people out of stricken cities.

"Sollace has the dual ability to catch the European spirit and to write accessible American dialogue," says Duplat. "This is wonderful for us because most European English language movies are bad translations. American audiences may understand the words but they don't feel they're hearing their own language."

Dr. M is a German-French-Italian co-production, a $6.5 million film with an international cast headed by Alan Bates, Jan Nicklas and Jennifer Beals. From the start, Chabrol, Duplat and his fellow executive producer, Hans Brockmann, agreed that the title role should be played by an Englishman. "Traditionally, English actors are really actors, they don't want to be the characters, they want to act them," Duplat explains. "Dr. M is a character who acts in life. We also wanted him to be distinguished and perverse and I think the English are the best at that. Alan accepted the part as soon as he read the script."

The filmmakers also wanted a foreigner to play Sonja Vogler so as to increase her alienation from the city she dominates so effectively. When Duplat met Jennifer Beals over a business dinner with her husband (American filmmaker Alexandre Rockwell), he knew within two minutes that he had found his Sonja. "She is very pretty and she has mystery in her eyes. That's the first thing you notice, her wonderful big eyes, which is interesting for a movie to do with hypnosis."

Jan Niklas, one of Germany's most popular film actors, plays Klaus Hartmann, the West Berlin police detective who emerges as Dr. M's most persistent adversary. The smaller role of police chief goes to Wolfgang Preiss who played the,lead in Lang's **The Thousand Eyes of Dr. Mabuse**. The remainder of the cast are classical actors from the German theatre. "We followed Lang's lead by choosing very good actors for small roles," Duplat comments. "We believed that a small part played by a bad actor would automatically lose weight and so harm the story."

Dr. M was filmed in West Berlin over 11 weeks between October and December 1989. The aim was to make the city immediately recognisable but not in a picture postcard way. Accordingly 93 widely varying locations were chosen, among them the morgue and the airport, but the filmmakers avoided tourist attractions like the Brandenburg Gate and the Kurfurstendamm. The studio work, which included many technically sophisticated video sequences, was done at Filmatelier Haselhorst, built on the land where Lang made **Dr. Mabuse, The Gambler** back in 1922. In January 1990, cast and crew moved to the Canary Islands for a week to shoot the Club Theratos scenes.

DISNEY animation returns to its classic fairy tale roots for the first time in three decades with its 28th full-length animated feature **The Little Mermaid**. Hans Christian Andersen's enchanting fantasy of a beautiful young mermaid who risks life and "limbs" to be part of the human world when she meets the prince of her dreams provided the Disney creative team with one of its strongest stories in years and one of its greatest challenges ever. Disney veterans John Musker and Ron Clements share writing and directing credits for **The Little Mermaid**, as they had previously done on the studio's 1986 animated feature **The Great Mouse Detective**.

Along with a colourful new cast of animated characters, some dazzling art direction and effects animation, the film features seven outstanding new tunes, resulting from a unique collaboration with the celebrated songwriting team of Howard Ashman and Alan Menken (**Little Shop of Horrors**). The songs are integrally woven into the plot and add a sense of theatricality seldom achieved in this art form.

"When people think of Disney, they think of classical fairy tales," observes senior vice president of feature animation, Peter Schneider. "That is the heritage of this company. **The Little Mermaid** was a perfect project for us in that it met our two primary goals of having a great story and great characters. Being a classic fairy tale, it also had the strong value system and view of the world that has always made Disney animation special. In a sense, the moral here is that children have to grow up and be who they are. The problem of parents trying to hang on too long is a very contemporary one."

A team of over 400 artists and technicians laboured for nearly three years to produce **The Little mermaid**. In the end, nearly 150,000 hand-painted cels and 1,100 backgrounds utilising more than 1,000 different colours went into making the 7,000 feet of hand-drawn film. Additionally, in excess of a million drawings (Story sketches, pencil animation, layouts, etc.) were created during the production process.

With two thirds of the film set underwater, innovative animation techniques and an abundance of effects animation were required to enhance the illusion. Character animators had to re-orient themselves to a world where the rules of gravity didn't apply and the sense of weight they normally strive to achieve in their drawings had to be radically shifted. Effects animators handcrafted hundreds of thousands of bubbles, not to mention reflective light patterns, distortions and other tricks of their trade.

Fairy tales have been a favourite source of inspiration for Disney animators dating back to the studio's earliest days. Walt Disney had remembered the story of **Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs** from his childhood and felt it had all the classic elements of good vs. evil that he was looking for in his first feature project. **Cinderella** was said to be a personal favourite of Disney's because the rags to riches tale was reminiscent of his own humble origins. The universal theme in **Sleeping Beauty** that true love conquers all also lent itself to the Disney philosophy.

What makes fairy tales so suitable for animation? According to director John Musker, "Fairy tales are usually set in a fantastic landscape, and animation, by the very nature of the medium, can create its own world from scratch. For example, **The Little Mermaid** as we've approached it couldn't have been done in live-action."

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"In terms of the stories themselves," continues Musker, "great fairy tales can speak directly to children and teach them things about life they can use later on. They also tend to have a timeless and universal quality that appeals to practically everyone in some way or another. With **Mermaid**, we're hoping that kids and parents will identify with the relationship between a father and daughter and that the story will stay with them long after the film is over."

Co-director Ron Clements believes that another great aspect of fairy tales is their ability to instill hope. "They tend to be uplifting and offer some hope of success no matter how impossible the dream," he observes. "Many great fairy tales also deal with coming of age, like the transitional period from childhood to adulthood. In **The Little Mermaid**, Ariel goes from being a teenage girl to a young woman, overcoming problems with her father and traumas along the way."

The idea of doing this current animated version of **The Little Mermaid** dates back to 1985, when Ron Clements first encountered the story while browsing in a bookstore. He was just wrapping up his assignment as co-director on **The Great Mouse Detective** and had been scouting around for future projects. The prospect of doing an underwater fantasy was particularly intriguing to him. The Andersen tale had all the elements he was looking for but there were some distinct challenges in adapting it to the screen.

"When I first read **The Little Mermaid**, I thought it was a beautiful and poetic story with really exciting visual opportunities," recalls Clements. "It was so cinematic, that the images seemed to leap off the page. But it was also one of the saddest stories ever written. The biggest problem was with Andersen's ending where the mermaid sacrifices herself and turns into a sea foam spirit when her love is unrequited."

"We knew we needed a happier ending to really make it work for our purposes. We tried to come up with a way of doing that and somehow remaining faithful to the basic themes of the story. Our ending retains the bittersweet quality of the original story, and yet is uplifting at the same time."

Clements initially wrote a two-page treatment for **The Little Mermaid**, which

was presented to Jeffrey Katzenberg and Roy Disney in 1985. With their approval, the treatment was expanded to 20 pages, with John Musker joining his colleague in the writing process. In this version, the unnamed seawitch from Andersen's story became more of a villain and figured more prominently into the overall story. Characters like Sebastian, Flounder and Scuttle were created and personalities for Triton and the Prince began taking shape.

"As animators here at Disney, our biggest challenge is not only to make the characters move but also to make them breathe," says animating director Glen Keane. "They have to appear to be thinking and making their own decisions. You have to see the thinking process. Whenever I do a scene where that comes across, then I feel I've accomplished something."

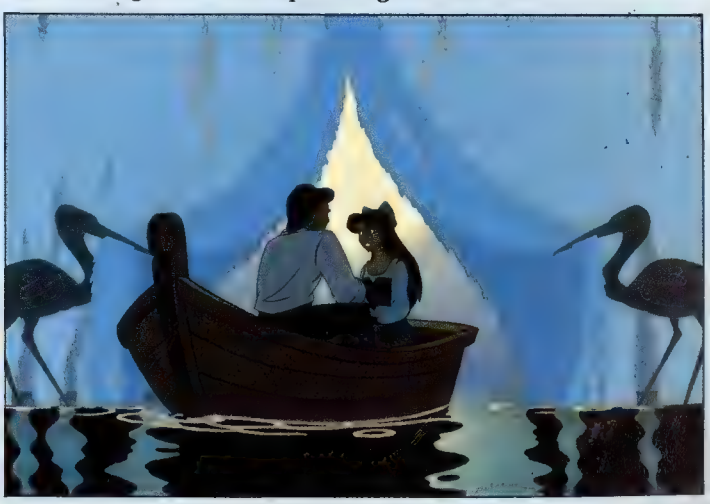
Andreas Deja, another of the film's directing animators, sums it up this way: "To be a good animator, you have to like what you're doing so much that the drawing part is really secondary. The things that are uppermost in your mind are acting, emotions, communicating clearly, and getting it all technically right. You just happen to be drawing at the same time."

With these ideas in mind, the **Mermaid** creative team set out to design and animate a new cast of characters that would come to life on the big screen. In the early stages of production, a large aquarium was moved into the animation building and artists with sketch pads frequently gathered to study and draw the exotic fish. Research photos from **National Geographic** and reference books were plastered on the walls of the animators' rooms.

Live-action models also proved useful for study purposes. Sherri Stoner, a talented young actress/performer with Los Angeles' premiere comedy improvisation group, **The Groundlings**, was called in to model for the title mermaid. Animators were able to study her movements as she swam about in a clear glass tank (8 feet deep) filled with water.

Directing animator Mark Henn credits Stoner with inspiring some of Ariel's facial expressions as well. "She was able to bring to the character a unique and believable spark which we may not have thought of otherwise," says Henn. "Little things like the way she bites her lip were incorporated into Ariel's personality and helped bring the character alive."

According to effects animation supervsor Mark Dindal, "This film has more effects than probably any film since **Fantasia**. Nearly 80% of the film required some kind of effects work. The fairy tale setting gave us the challenge of coming up with images that were new and fantasy-related. The more successful we are, the more the audience is pulled into the story. We tried to strike the right balance so that the effects added enough without overpowering the characters."



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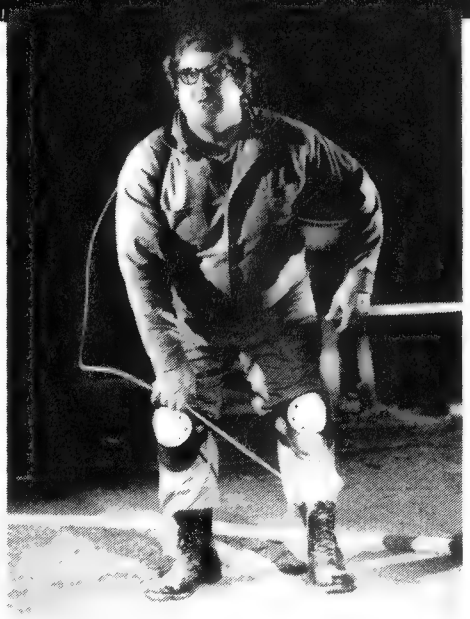
ARACHNOPHOBIA



CANAIMA, California, seemed the ideal spot for Dr. Ross Jennings (Jeff Daniels) and his wife Molly (Harley Jane Kozak), to raise their two children (Garette Patrick Ratliff and Marlene Katz). Far from the dangers and congestion of the city, this picturesque community nestled between rolling green hills and rocky cliffs overlooking the Pacific Ocean promises fresh air and friendly people. But, the Jennings soon discover that they aren't the only new kids on the block. There's an unexpected guest living in their barn, a disturbing presence that shakes up the peace and quiet of the small village.

In the days that follow, several of Canaima's leading citizens meet their new neighbour - as well as their Maker. And by the time the shocked residents - including Delbert McClintock (John Goodman), the "Rambo" of insect exterminators - notice what has arrived in town, their sleepy hamlet is caught in a web of chaos, in the first release from The Walt Disney Studio's newest production entity, Hollywood Pictures. Directed by Frank Marshall, **Arachnophobia** is a Hollywood Pictures and Amblin Entertainment presentation.

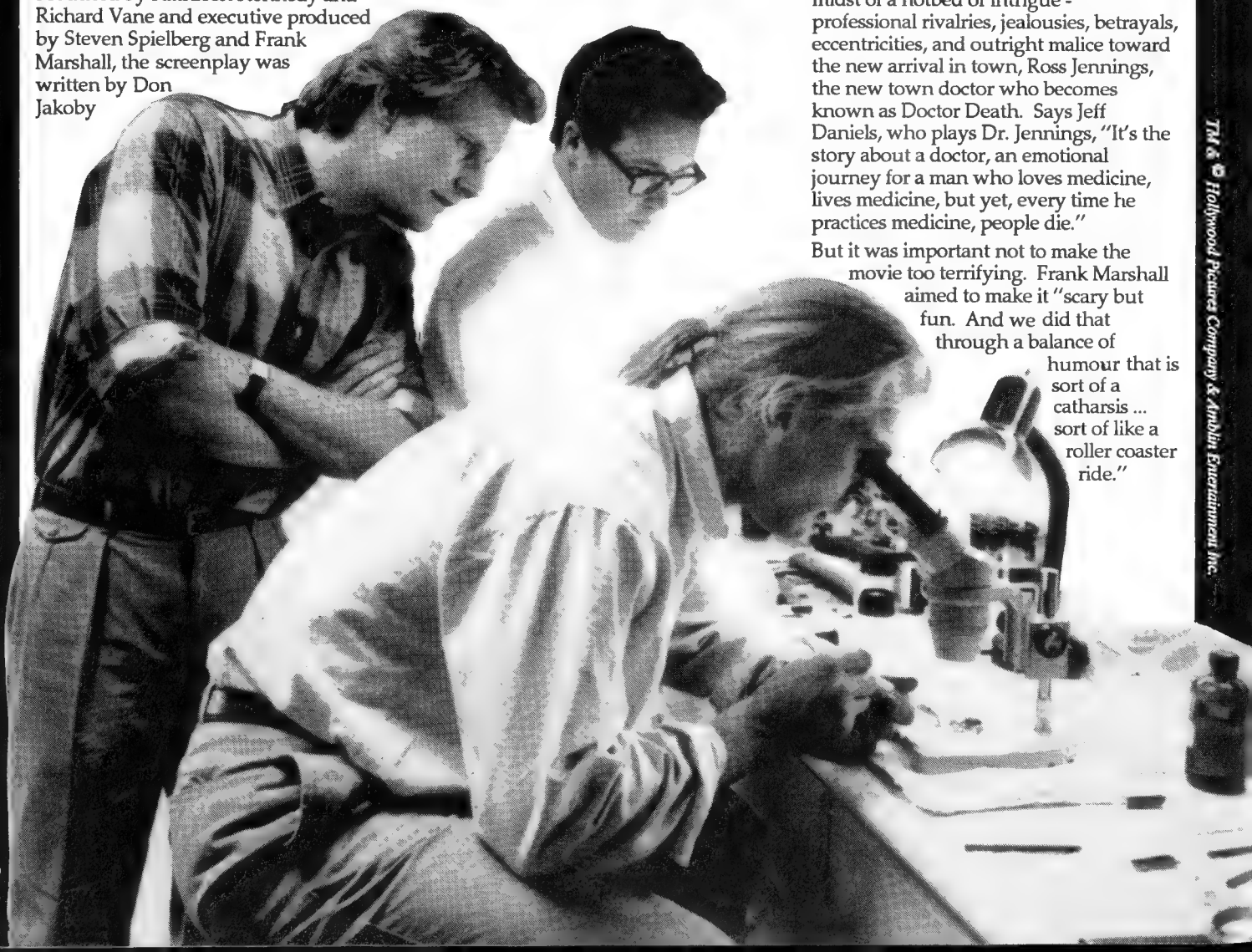
Produced by Kathleen Kennedy and Richard Vane and executive produced by Steven Spielberg and Frank Marshall, the screenplay was written by Don Jakoby and Wesley Strick from a story by Jakoby and Al Williams. Mikael Salomon is the director of photography, James Bissel is the production designer and Michael Kahn handles the editing duties. Buena Vista Picture distributes.

To prepare for making **Arachnophobia**, director Frank Marshall looked at some of the great thrillers of all time. He wanted to structure the storyline around an as yet unexplored phobia - arachnophobia, the fear of spiders - along the lines of Hitchcock's **Vertigo, Psycho** and **The Birds**. For good measure he also looked at **Jaws, Alien** and **High Noon** to study how their pacing was designed.

"The suspense was really fun to design," says Marshall. "I spent a lot of time looking at Hitchcock movies and seeing that one of the ways he set up suspense so well is in the imagination. In other words, the mind can create a lot more suspense than what you just put on the screen. So I cut away a lot just before something really horrible happens. And your mind then takes you that further step."

And that further step lies in imagining what happens when people's phobias run amok, even in a small sleepy town like Canaima. The town has a deadly secret hidden away in Ross Jennings' barn, a secret visitor from the rain forests of Venezuela, and the town's gossips quickly get to work imagining the worst. Soon the citizens of Canaima are in the midst of a hotbed of intrigue - professional rivalries, jealousies, betrayals, eccentricities, and outright malice toward the new arrival in town, Ross Jennings, the new town doctor who becomes known as Doctor Death. Says Jeff Daniels, who plays Dr. Jennings, "It's the story about a doctor, an emotional journey for a man who loves medicine, lives medicine, but yet, every time he practices medicine, people die."

But it was important not to make the movie too terrifying. Frank Marshall aimed to make it "scary but fun. And we did that through a balance of humour that is sort of a catharsis ... sort of like a roller coaster ride."



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ARACHNOPHOBIA

Such fears and phobias are archetypal and universal. They can be disabling as in the case of Norman Bates in Hitchcock's **Psycho**, Scottie in **Vertigo** and the entire cast of **The Birds**. "The interesting thing about arachnophobia," says Marshall, "is that many people are just born with it. It's not something that we acquire. I think 22% of people have this and they don't know why. We all have a little bit of it in us." But for Marshall it may also be just a state of mind. Indiana Jones has to deal with his fear of snakes and rats in his various adventures, but he overcomes his phobias. Ross Jennings too has to come face to face with his arachnophobia before he can save the town from its nemesis and from itself. "The audience likes to see a hero who is vulnerable. So they totally and immediately identify with him and go through the movie feeling what he's feeling. So it becomes very much an audience participation movie."

In December 1989, a limited cast and crew took on the monumental task of filming **Arachnophobia**'s opening sequences in a remote region of Venezuela. With their destination set in an area near Angel Falls in the heart of the Venezuelan rain forest, the company rented a C-130 transport plane and shipped in camera equipment.

Richard Vane recalls, "We had to make sure that we had every conceivable piece of equipment in that plane, which then had to be off-loaded on forklifts, which we also had to fly in with us. From there, everything was loaded onto boats en route to the remote island where we were shooting."

The company's five helicopters, rented from the police in Caracas and the Venezuelan National Guard, lifted off each morning before dawn and climbed 3,000 feet past roaring waterfalls and clear blue rivers to the top of the tepuis (mountain plateaus). After sunset, the cast and crew returned to a small enclave of huts at the base of the magnificent falls called Canaima. The company enjoyed their stay in Canaima so much, they named the fictitious California town into which Dr. Jennings and his family move after the real village where they shot in Venezuela.

Marshall considered it a great privilege to be allowed by the Venezuelan government to film on the tepuis, and extraordinary precautions were taken not to harm the delicate environment. The crew set up a survival camp on the shelf of the main tepui each day in case the constantly changing weather trapped them. "Some days I would just get one take," says Marshall. "Not one scene, but one take, and there'd be an hour before the sun came out again. And this one day, we were trapped the whole day. We actually built the survival camp and 15 minutes before we were going to be stuck all night, the clouds sort of opened up and we all dove in helicopters. Left all the equipment, cameras, film, everything there and got out just in time."

Although the script called for some scenes inside a sinkhole on the tepuis, it was impossible for the crew to descend 2,000 feet into this area with their heavy equipment. Undaunted, production designer James Bissel undertook the enormous task of designing and supervising the construction of a tropical rain forest on one of the largest sound stages in Hollywood, formerly MGM's famous Stage 30.

The result was a cavernous but magical environment, complete with waterfalls, towering trees, moss covered boulders and gigantic spider webs.

Upon the company's return to Los Angeles, Marshall and the crew moved to Stage 30 and filmed a complicated scene in which Dr. Atherton (Julian Sands) uses a fogging gun filled with biodegradeable insecticide to bring down bugs and insects from the tree canopy surrounding him. From every corner of the stage, on ladders and crouching in trees, crew members had the fun of showering the actors below with a rain that consisted of hundreds of butterflies and insects.

Four weeks of filming followed in Cambria, California, a charming oceanside town on the central coast that doubles for the movie's fictional town of Canaima.

Among the sets that were constructed in Cambria were the Jennings' beautiful old Victorian home and their barn, which becomes the headquarters for their Venezuelan visitor. And, members of Cambria's high school football team suited up for a scene in which a young player is the victim of the town's killer.

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ARACHNOPHOBIA

The film's final weeks concentrated on the "High Noon" showdown between Ross Jennings and his nemesis in his new wine cellar.

Arachnophobia is derived from the Greek word, arachne, meaning spider, and phobia, a synonym for fear. The fear of spiders appears to be an innate behaviour which can develop without any specific negative experience as its cause.

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A recent study conducted by the National Institute of Mental Health surveyed over 18,000 individuals, and found the most common phobias involve:

1] Spiders (bugs, mice and snakes)

2] Heights

Actually, the danger presented to humans by a spider is quite small. About 0.1% of all species are dangerous for man and many of the most venomous species live hidden, and scarcely make contact with people.

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That lot is just a wee selection by the way!

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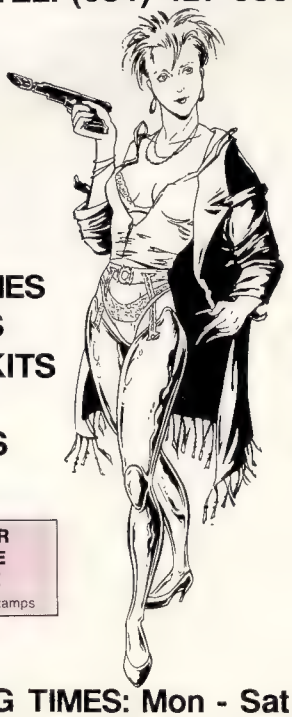

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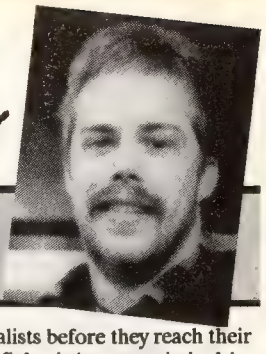
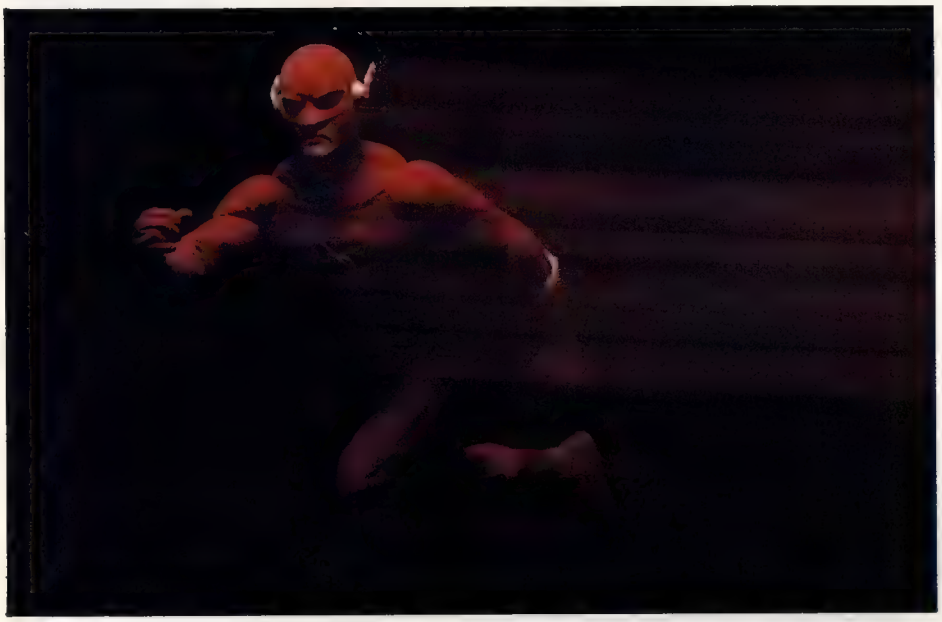
Andy Mangels BEHIND THE CAMERA



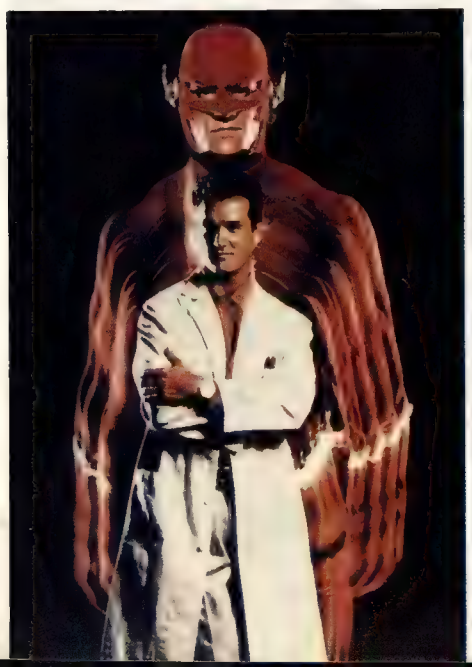
It's Christmas time for some and Hannukah for others, but whatever holiday you celebrate I hope it will be a time of happiness for you. Winter has brought Americans the first TV season cancellations in the war of the ratings, and the second set of big movie-openings in the war of the studios! With all these wars going on in entertainment (and in reality), we could sure use some of that infamous "Peace On Earth".

For new readers, this column has three sections: a review section for scripts/movies/TV series, a spotlight on a Hollywood actor or writer, and the latest hot scoops on what's coming out of filmland! This is our special red-for-Christmas issue!



The Flash TV Guide

With a two-hour debut on CBS-TV on September 9th, the always-late-in-the-comics Flash was almost late for his premiere! From the oddly-named Pet Fly Productions, wonder boys Danny Bilson and Paul DeMeo, **The Flash** is a one-hour super-speed series which is racing in with high ratings against the other runners. This guide reviews the first seven shows aired, while later issues will cover the rest of the first season!



#1 'The Pilot' - Danny Bilson & Paul DeMeo.

A gang of rogue bikers, led by angry ex-cop Pike, is terrorising Central City, and it's up to head-of-the-police-task-force Jay Allen to stop him. Unfortunately his brother, Barry, has just been hit by a lightning bolt while working in his lab, and is experiencing some weird side effects. When Jay is killed by Pike, Barry hooks up with STAR Labs scientist Tina McGee to stop Pike and his gang before they can break the prison walls open and raze the city. On the way, Barry picks up a nifty red and gold uniform, lotsa muscles, an amazing appetite, and a new nom de guerre ... the Flash!

This pilot film was a treat in almost all ways. Faithful to the comic, entertaining as a film, and with great special effects, its only fallbacks were a few lapses in science. Still, it compares well to the first **Superman** film in terms of quality.

#2 'Out of Control' - Gail Morgan Hickman.

An old science colleague of Tina McGee shows up, and Central City's homeless start winding up dead. The Flash finds out who's responsible, but can he stop the mad scientist before he injects himself with a mutant serum and becomes an incredible hulking thing? This was the weakest of the episodes, with some really poor special effects. Not a great follow-up to the pilot.

#3 'Watching the Detectives' - Howard Chaykin & John Moore.

A crooked District Attorney sets a smashing female private investigator out to track down the Flash's secret identity. She gets the information, and Barry is forced to do the DA's dirty work until he finds a way out from under his thumb. This is the best of the regular episodes, by far. The female P.I. is pure Chaykin, and will undoubtedly return.

#4 'Honour Among Thieves' - Milo Bachman, Danny Bilson, Paul DeMeo, Howard Chaykin & John Moore.

Six top international criminals show up in Central City, and it seems their target may be a priceless museum artifact. Can the Flash stop all of the crime specialists before they reach their real goal? Having to fight six 'master criminals' stretched Flash to the limits in this one, and the producers promise that the season's final (22nd) episode will feature a return of a quintet of the villains and a cliff-hanging ending!

#5 'Double Vision' - Jim Trombetta.

Flash becomes the puppet of the maniacal Trakman, who makes our hero terrorize a superstitious Mexican populace. When Flash is forced to kidnap the pretty daughter of a man who's going to testify in court against the wrong people, he has to somehow fight the mind-control and stop himself before it's too late. Trakman was a fun supervillain and merits a return appearance, and most of this episode sped right along.

#6 'Sins of the Father' - Stephen Hattman.

A murderer escapes from prison, and sets his marks on killing Henry Allen and his son Barry. He almost succeeds as well. A decent episode with lots of Flash action, this is marred by the fact that Henry doesn't recognise his own son as the Flash.

#7 'Child's Play' - Howard Chaykin, John Moore, Stephen Hattman & Gail Morgan Hickman.

Barry Allen becomes the temporary foster father to a pair of rascally street kids, one of whom secretly holds a computer disk with deadly information about a supposedly dead drug inventor. The heavy hippy elements and psychedelic drug villains were laughable and silly, but the Flash vibrates through a wall for the first time this episode!

The main **Flash** cast includes: Barry Allen/Flash - John Wesley Shipp; Tina McGee - Amanda Pays; Barry's assistant Julio Mendez - Alex Desert. Two bumbling Central City cops usually steal the show's best lines; Officer Murphy is played by Biff Manard, while Officer Bellows is Vito B'Ambrosio. Bob Short made the Flash costume from a re-design by Dave Stevens.

The Flash features many comic book in-jokes, from a theatrical double-bill of **Batman** and **Superman** past which the Flash runs to references to expecting phone calls from Carter Hall. Garrick Avenue is often a busy site, **Flash** comic regular Linda Parks has appeared, and supervillains are lined up down the road. All in all, as I said before, **The Flash** is a real treat for comic fans.

Flash TM & © D.C. Comics Inc.

Spotlight on Stacy Haiduk

She's been almost the only constant on a decently rated TV series now in its third season. Stacy Haiduk, who plays the ravishing Lana Lang on **Superboy** (now called **The Adventures of Superboy**), has remained through two Clark Kent/Superboys, four co-stars, and two Lex Luthors. Indeed, it seems Miss Haiduk may lead a charmed actress' life. Enjoy these excerpts from several interviews with Stacy:

On her audition for the role of Lana Lang: "I auditioned for Lynn Stalmaster. Ilya Salkind and Bob Simmonds and one of the writers were

there. I didn't know who Ilya or Alexander Salkind were! I think that made it easier to go into the audition."

On a disappointing call-back audition: "I thought they were just using me to test for Superboy and that they had found another Lana Lang. I remember going home and crying after the testing. When they told me I had the part, I found out it was the way they wanted Lana, but they had to look for a Superboy who was tall enough!"

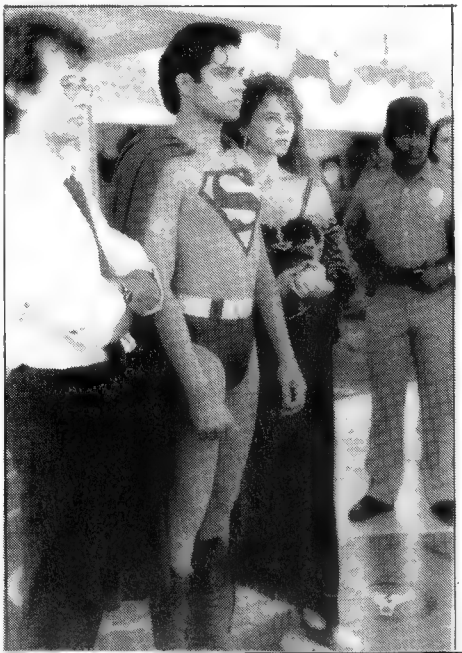
On her unusual hobby of... boxing?: "I thought it would be interesting, because I'm a tomboy. I do all these guy's sport type of things. I enjoy the exhilarating feeling you get with punching people!"

On previous 'modelling' and past credits: "I don't like to talk about it too much. I did it for the money. I did some catalogue work, but I never really cared for modelling. It's boring."

On her striking white/blue eyes: "I've gotten asked if they're contacts. Every audition I've been to I've been asked that. The blue really stands out on film. They are the highlight of my body or my face. I would never give them up for anything."

On a typical day of shooting: "We start out at 4.30 or 5.30 in the morning with hair and makeup. There's a lot of sitting around because they've got to set up the cameras and the scene. It goes from sometimes 5.30 in the morning to 8.00 or 9.00 at night."

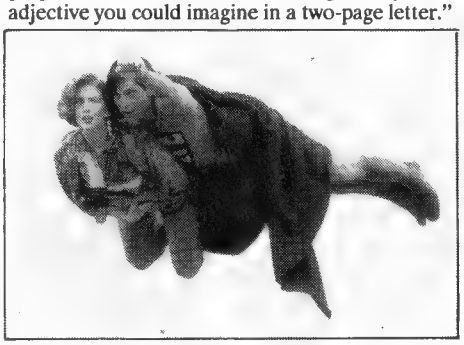
On Lana Lang's changing character: "How many times can Lana get kidnapped or thrown off a helicopter or pushed off a train? Now I think Lana is much stronger, and very smart. She knows what she wants and when she goes after something, she goes after it."



On an early episode directed by Superman film veteran Jackie Cooper: "I do not care for Jackie Cooper. Whether saying this is going to get to me in the long run ... he was one of the directors that would tell you what to do. I don't like it when a director doesn't work with you, but works at you. I remember one time we were doing a take and he yelled at me because I wasn't doing a line the 'right' way. It's very nerve-wracking when you've got a director who yells on the set all of the time."

On a falling scene done with wires and a backdrop: "I was up on these wires twirling around for 45 minutes, going around and around ... I got so sick. I got down and I didn't know which way was up or which way was down. I just wanted to sleep. I remember we had to do two more takes after that on those wires and I was just 'whoah!"

On fan letters: "I get some weird ones. One I got recently was from somebody who was imprisoned for life in Texas. I guess it should be kind of scary, but it really made my day to hear from somebody in prison who was watching the show and writing. One letter was so hilarious. It just kept going on and on with 'you're voluptuous, you're beautiful, your eyes are gorgeous.' That was the whole thing. Every adjective you could imagine in a two-page letter."



On sexuality in future film roles: "I have a body, and it's sometimes very hard not to get typecast into using my body. I get a lot of role offers which say 'This has nudity and it is a lead part.' It's kind of nerve-wracking. I don't want to be known as doing sex films. I want to be known as an actress."

On whether or not Clark Kent could keep his secret from Lana: "With a pair of glasses? Are you kidding me? I put on a pair, is somebody not going to call me Stacy? I think in time, she's really going to figure out who he is."

Stacy is, by the way, dreading the release of **Luther the Geek**, a direct-to-video slasher film which featured her at 18, in a nude shower sequence (referred to above). She is not, however, dreading the release of her first feature film, **Steel & Lace**, coming soon. This new horror film is from Charles Fries Entertainment (which brought us the live-action **Spider-Man** TV show). It is a **Bride of Frankenstein** remake, starring Stacy as an investigator into a series of vengeful murders, committed by a re-animated female cyborg. Advance word is good.

Meanwhile, **Superboy** has added two new regular cast members: Robert Levin plays C. Dennis Jackson, the head of the Bureau for Extranormal Matters, while Peter Fernandez plays Matt Ritter, one of the men who works there. Both are assisting Clark Kent and Lana Lang, two interns at the Bureau. Upcoming guest-stars include rock star Greg Allman as a villain, the wrestler Lex Luger, and a mysterious tall leather-clad blonde who plays Neila, an embittered Amazon. The show's 13 new episodes are filmed more at night, and showcase more adult themes (hmmm, do we detect a trend?)

News Reels

CBS is hot on finishing development on Hanna-Barbera's **Fish Police** series, described by their spokespeople as "Dick Tracy meets the Little Mermaid". The 'fish noir' series is one of three being developed for next Fall release, assuming the prime-time animation frenzy started by the **Simpsons** doesn't swallow them all up. The other two are Tim Burton and Steven Spielberg's **Family Dog** (debuting in March) and the new half-hour MGM **Pink Panther** series combining live-action and animation a la **Roger Rabbit**. This latter is a mid-season replacement.

After waiting years for both the **Spider-Man** movie and the **Captain America** Broadway musical, this year sees the un-release of the **Captain America** film (still re-shooting) and the announcement of the **Amazing Spider-Man** musical! Radio City Music Hall is producing with Marvel, while Keith Herrmann is scoring and Barry Harman is writing the script and lyrics. An ever-optimistic producer William Michael Maher, expects the show to begin touring in Fall 1991, with a potential Broadway opening in 1992. All those who believe this is likely, please raise your hand. Now, use that hand to slap some sense into yourself.

Don't expect to see the latest Godzilla pic, **Godzilla vs. Biollante** in legitimate release anytime soon. Toho International has sued Miramax, with whom they entered into an oral agreement to distribute the film. Guess that reinforces the old rule of "Get it on paper, especially when dealing with Hollywood."

What I wanna know is what AIP Distribution's 'R' rated **Robo C.H.I.C.** is, and where can I watch it? And watch out, as director Fred Dekker and 'screenwriter' Frank Miller begin work on the untitled **RoboCop III**. Orion is still financing, Patrick Crowley is producing, and this time they're taking aim for a 'PG' or 'PG-13' rating.

Italy's about ready to deliver their latest comic strip TV show. Actor Terence Hill headlines the western series **Lucky Luke**, now lensing in Santa Fe, California. Morris De Bevere's comic strip is set for nine episodes, although expected high foreign sales could extend shooting to 13 episodes. Paloma Films has set a budget of $22 million.

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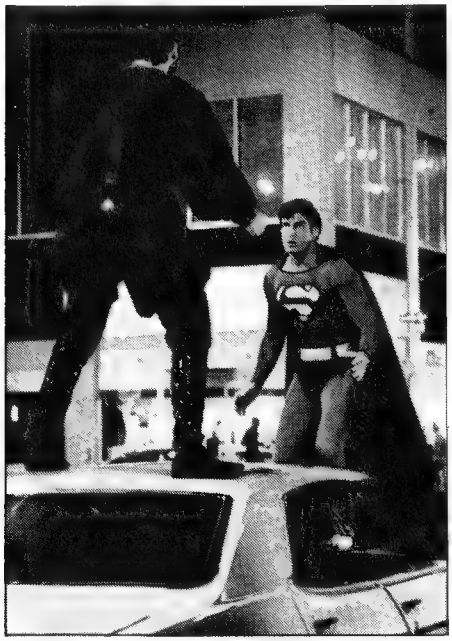
Andy Mangels
BEHIND THE CAMERA

I thought you'd like to know that **Bill & Ted Go To Hell** starts filming January 2nd. Everyone important to the film reprises their roles. Excellent, dudes.

Viacom, which has produced **Superboy**'s companion show, the moronic **Super Force**, has put two more action-hero series into development. **Phantom Force** tells of a young hero who is assigned to protect the President, while **Night Master** is a "James Bond meets Kung Fu" martial arts program. If development continues, the four shows would be marketed as a two-hour block of programming.

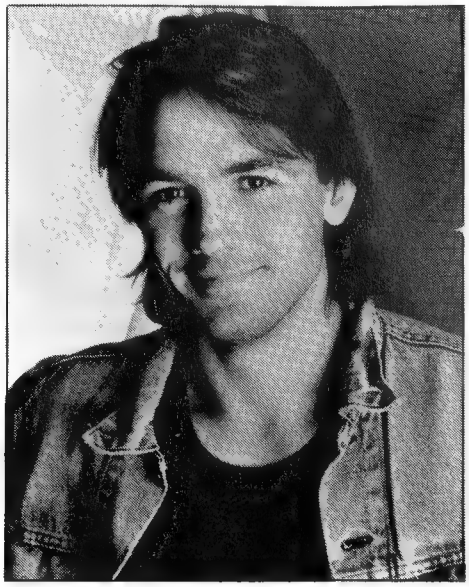


Work is proceeding on **Superman V**, now called **Superman: The New Movie**. Despite past reports (here and elsewhere) it seems that the discussed ecological bent is out, as is the possibility of a parallel universe. Producer Ilya Salkind's production office expects shooting to begin early next year. No casting is completed, and Christopher Reeve is not in or out. In fact, as of this writing, they have not begun negotiations with him, not exactly a good sign. Immediately following **Superman**, the Salkinds will be starting on **Christopher Columbus**, with **Superman** planned for a late 1991 release.

Last issue I told you about the new film, **Hook**, which casts Dustin Hoffman as Captain Hook and Robin Williams as Peter Pan's great-grandson. Now it appears Tri-Star will be filming **Hook** back-to-back with **Peter Pan**, and that Robin Williams is playing an adult Peter instead. Steven Spielberg will be directing **Hook**, and rumours are that Joe Dante will helm **Peter Pan**.

I've also reported on the casting of Anjelica Houston as Morticia Adams in the upcoming **Adams Family** film from Orion. Now, Raul Julia has signed on to play Gomez. Barry Sodderfield started directing this pic on November 26th.

Horror fans not satisfied with the three-way punch of **Stephen King's Graveyard Shift, Stephen King's IT** (a four-hour mini-series), and **Stephen King's Misery**, can content themselves with the knowledge that casting has begun for **Stephen King's The Dark Half**. In fact, if everything's going right (a Hollywood improbability), George Romero has already written and started directing the film by the time you read this! British release dates on the first three King projects are unknown at this time, but having just seen the first part of **IT**, I can say you'll love **IT**. Tim Curry plays a great Pennywise, the evil clown!



Touchstone's **The Rocketeer**, directed by Joe Johnston (**Honey, I Shrunk The Kids**) is going great guns. Recent filming in Santa Maria included air show scenes with 650 extras, all attired in 1938 period clothing. The movie, which insiders note is being marketed as a movie with a story, not a vehicle for big-name stars, is planned for release early next summer.

As mentioned in the past, almost-unknown Bill Campbell is the Rocketeer, Jennifer Connelly (**Labyrinth, Hot Spot**) is Betty Blake, Alan Arkin is Peevy, Timothy Dalton is the suave movie-star Neville Sinclair, and the brilliant Terry O'Quinn (**Stepfather**) is none other than Howard Hughes!

One NBC mid-season replacement is going full-steam ahead into and out of its grave. Dan Curtis' new **Dark Shadows** is expected to be one of the first replacements picked up. The two-hour pilot has been shot, and eight episodes are finished to date. Twelve shows plus the pilot will be shot by year's end, leaving them open for easy slotting at the beginning of 1991. Casting for the new one-hour horror-drama-soap opera includes Ben Cross as reluctant vampire Barnabas Collins, Jean Simmons as the matriarchal Elizabeth Collins Stoddard, Barbara Steele as medical researcher Dr. Julia Hoffman, and Lysette Anthony as the blond witch Angelique. The show is said to be a favourite of NBC President Brandon Tartikoff.

In other horror news, Clive Barker will be writing and directing a 'new' feature for Universal Studios. Watch for **The Mummy** to shamble onto movie screens next year (but don't expect Universal's new acquisition, Harvey Comics, to do the adaptation!). And with Fangoria Films now owning the rights to future **Hellraiser** films, you can expect more Cenobiting fun.

USA Network's **Swamp Thing** has been doing extremely well in its ratings. The network has ordered nine more episodes, bringing the total number up to 22. MCA will be releasing the series to foreign markets with three adventures per tape, featuring some new material, such as female frontal nudity in the "Legend of the Swamp Maiden" episode. Meanwhile, Kenner's pushed production up on their **Swamp Thing** toy line, and it will now be in stores and on sale before Christmas!

Bowl-cut and all, the good **Prince Valiant** will be making his TV appearances next year, as the series goes into development.

The Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles' "Coming Out Of Their Shell Tour" has opened in the U.S., to generally good reviews for a kid's concert. The show begins as April O'Neil broadcasts live on-the-scene comments about the concert from within the crowd. The broadcast is shown on large screens, and the Turtles eventually make their first appearances from beneath four giant manhole covers. The opening song is the exciting "Pizza Power". As the show continues, April broadcasts news-bits from within the crowd of screaming pre-pubescent youth. Be still my faint heart!

Sorry, dear readers, no **Batman II** news this time. The script's done, Tim Burton is signed to direct, but that's all the farther things have progressed. Maybe next time.

Backstage to the Future

If you like this column, and good movie comics, I hope you'll pick up my all-new **Child's Play** series from Innovation. You might also check out my new movie/TV column, **Andy Mangels' Reel Marvel** in **Marvel Age Magazine**. It details Marvel's celluloid history through cartoons, film, and television.

My final plug is for another new series of mine starting in January from Rip Off Press. It's called **Annie Sprinkle in The Adventures of Miss Timed** or just **Annie Sprinkle is Miss Timed** for short. It's an Adults-Only sexy romp through history with controversial real-life adult film star, Annie Sprinkle! Maggie Thatcher will definitely not approve, and it may not make it through customs, but if it does, it's worth a look or two!

Next month, slip into something green to welcome in the New Year. We'll be taking a look at TV's new **Swamp Thing** series (soon on video in the UK), including a talk with the man behind the moss, Dick Durock! And in a special non-**Behind The Camera** feature, I'll be doing a steamy interview with B-movie goddess Sybil Danning, including a sizzling centrefold! Plus, we'll have lots of news for 1991's start!

We'll see you next ... year ... **Behind The Camera**! Happy Holidays!

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SPRING HEELED JACK

MORE THAN THE USUAL HELPING OF THIS STRANGE, BEWILDERING AND SOMETIMES COMPLETELY COMIC-STRIP-LIKE GRAPHIC EXPRESSION OF AN ARTIST'S SUFFERING (THAT LAST BIT ISN'T SENSIBLE) BY PAUL H BIRCH (WRITER) AND ERASMUS (ARTIST) 90

WELL, ABOUT TWO HUNDRED YEARS AGO A GROSSEBAGGE-WYNDE LEFT A TAVERN LATE ONE NIGHT...
HE WAS LOOKING FOR A STATIONARY BUSH.
HIC! PHEW – SOMEONE'S BEEN HERE ALREADY.
HP! WHAZZAT?
SKRSH
HE SAW THIS STRANGE DWELLING ...
AND HANSEL AND GRETAL WERE LICKING THE DOORSTEP!
SQUATTERS EH?
HIC! I'LL GET HOME IN NO TIME AT ALL WITH THESE – ONCE I'VE RELIEVED MY BLADDER...
HIS OWN SHOES WERE RUINED BY THE PANCAKE HE'D STOOD IN, SO HE ACQUIRED NEW FOOTWEAR.
BUT HE WAS BEING WATCHED.
HELLO, BUT YOU'RE A BIG DOG!
GRRR
FOR ME?
LOST YOUR MASTER HAVE YOU? WELL COME ON BOY, I COULD DO WITH A NEW HUNTING HOUND. TALLY HO!
GROWRR
THE NEXT DAY THE MIGRANTS' DWELLING WAS NO MORE THAN A MEMORY. THEIR APPARENT READINESS TO ABANDON THEIR PET PERHAPS EXPLAINS THE EXTRAORDINARY VARIETY OF DOG BREED ALREADY ON THE PLANET.
SO YOU THINK IT WAS ALIENS?
GRANDFATHER TRULY BELIEVES IT WAS FAIRIES.

THE GOODS HAVE SINCE BEEN PASSED DOWN FROM GENERATION TO GENERATION. HEAVEN KNOWS SANITY'S A RARE WINE IN THIS FAMILY.
UNFORTUNATELY ONE WAS A FLASHER WHO CHOSE LONDON TO MAKE A PRAT OF HIMSELF.
IN 1831 THE NEWSPAPER HEADLINES WERE AS CREATIVE AS THEY ARE TODAY...
POLICE NEWS
THE COILED SPRING OF SOCIAL CONSCIENCE OR THE SPOILED KING OF SELF INDULGENCE? HIGHWAYMAN OR HAYCRIMIN THE TRUTH BEHIND SPRING HEELED JACK
STILL, HIS GRANDSON SOLVED THE WHITECHAPEL MURDERS...
KOFF WHAT?
AT LEAST THAT'S OUR INTERPRETATION OF HIS DIARY.
SINCE THEN THE TRADITION HAS FLOURISHED THOUGH THE JACKS THEMSELVES HAVE AVOIDED THE LIMELIGHT.
APART FROM LIVERPOOL IN 1904 WHEN A SLOSHED JACK WAS SEEN CELEBRATING THE BIRTH OF HIS SUCCESSOR ON THE ROOF OF A RESTRICTED GOVERNMENT BUILDING.
I CAN'T SEEM TO HIT HIM SARGE!
THAT'S BECAUSE YOU'RE FIRING BLANKS YOU IDIOT. WE'RE BRITISH SENTRIES, NOT THE NEW YORK POLICE DEPARTMENT!
BANG BANG
NOT MANY PEOPLE HEARD ABOUT GRANDAD'S NON-EVENT DURING THE FESTIVAL OF BRITAIN IN '51.
THE COMPANIA'S MOORED AT THE NEXT JETTY SIR.
FESTIVAL OF BRITAIN
COMPANIA
DAD VISITED AN OLD RAF FRIEND AT HIS PLACE OF WORK IN GOWER ST EUSTON ... IT SPARKED OFF A TERRIBLE IDEA...
WHY DON'T YOU DO A COMIC ABOUT SPRING HEELED JACK?
THAT'S A TERRIBLE IDEA.
PUH. IT'S JUST AHEAD OF IT'S TIME, THAT'S ALL.
DAD READ SCARLET PIMPERNELL STORIES UNDER THE BEDCLOTHES AT ETON.
I'VE BEEN PREPARING FOR THIS ALL MY JOLLY OLD LIFE!
GOOD OLD DAD. ALWAYS READY WITH A HEARTY PUNCHLINE AND A SWIFT RIGHT HOOK TO FOLLOW.
BUT YOU'RE GOING TO BE THE BEST SPRING HEELED JACK OF ALL DAVY.
IF WE EVER FIND OUT WHAT THAT ENTAILS.
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Movie news is our own merchandise preview magazine sent with our catalogue every two months.
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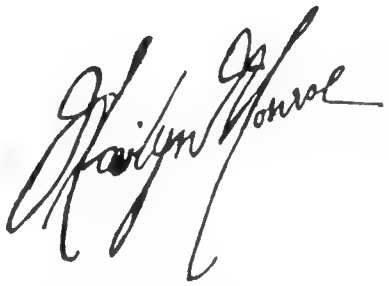

Marilyn Monroe is still the most popular screen actress today, we have a good range of books, posters and postcards. Plus many of her films are now available on video, including three documentaries.

We have one of the largest ranges of Batman merchandise in the UK.
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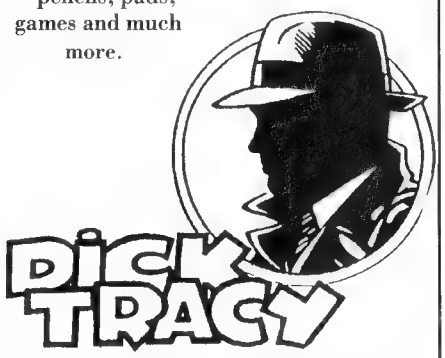

New merchandise coming in includes: Dick Tracy, Gremlins II (including those cuddly Mogwi's) The Flintstones, Robocop II, Back to the Future II and III, Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles, Jetsons and more besides. See later issues of movie news for previews

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Kerpow! It's Kersplat!

By Timothy Robins

"I hope we will offend comics fans, comics fans deserve to be offended," says Robin Lyons, co-writer of **Kersplat**, a new TV series that takes an off-kilter look at the world of comic books.

Kersplat is a 10 part co-production between Siriol, best known for their animation series **Superted**, and Red Rooster Films, responsible for **Coming Up Roses** and the science series **Equinox**. Each of **Kersplat**'s parts is an 11-minute serio-comic dramatisation of particular comic book themes or genres.

"Although we cover fan favourites like superheroes, we also cover the sort of things that fans don't collect," says Lyons. "For instance, I don't think cowboy comics are terribly popular any more."

"We wanted to show what was on offer, not just superheroes," agrees Andrew Offiler, Lyon's co-writer on the show. "I think what comics have got to offer is extremes. Everything in comics is a fantasy."

"We originally did a script for half an hour, but I think the 11 minute running time is a reflection of how long it takes to read a comic. It should be kind of quick and punchy, rather than an ordeal of an hour."

Offiler sees **Kersplat** as taking a very different approach to comic books, than documentaries like the recent **Comic Book Confidential**.

"That was aimed at comic fans who wanted to see the creators talking. Ours is more broader based. I enjoyed **Comic Book Confidential**, but I think you really had to know something about comics. The idea of our programme is to try and attract people who aren't that interested in comics, not just to please existing fans."

To be honest, there is very little chance of **Kersplat** pleasing existing fans. The show takes an irreverent, if not irrelevant, sideswipe at cherished fan institutions. When I talked to Lyons and Offiler, it was not long before they were reduced to helpless laughter over story titles like 'There's a Vampire in the Whitehouse' and 'The Girl Who Tempted Me'.

Kersplat, directed by Ian Emes and Joanna Hogg, chose to dramatise comic book genres with the aid of two actors, Kerry Shale and Judy Pascoe.

"We came up with this format which is basically a sketch with comics images interspersed with it," explains Lyons. Joanna plays Zelda Vortex, Kerry plays Grub, his first name changes in every programme. In one, he's Sheldon Grub, in the superhero one he's the Mighty Grub.

"The two characters' relationship also changes. In the 'Romance' one Zelda is an alien who's trying to seduce him. In the 'Haunted House' one, she is the sinister housekeeper. In the 'Underground' one Grub's a geriatric hippy in a wheelchair and she is his nurse who wants to kill him. Actually, quite a lot of the stories revolve around her trying to kill him."

"In the one on 'Revenge', Kerry plays this small, balding Woody Allen type and Judy, his huge newly wed wife. He takes her home and opens this door to his favourite room, which is full of comics. Even the furniture is made of comics. He says: 'These are my children' and starts kissing them."

"As their relationship develops, she does things like take out a copy of **Antboy** and puts it back under **Antman**. Eventually he catches her cutting out an advert for a Polaris submarine and just goes berserk. She finally takes revenge on him and files him under D for 'Dead'."

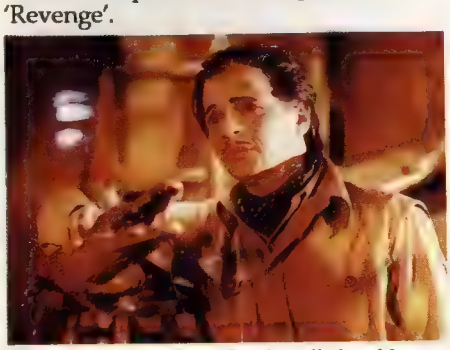
"The comics act as a sort of internal monologue of what is going on in the sketch. When Zelda says 'Let's bury the hatchet, you cut to this comic where a woman is burying a hatchet in someone's head."

Kersplat

Considering the teams' treatment of comics it is unsurprising to learn that DC Comics decided not to allow any of their material to be used in the programme, although Lyons notes that Marvel were "Very helpful".

"In the original script there was a patch of purple prose from Alan Moore which was all about Swamp Thing making love to his girlfriend. There was all this stuff about 'I am the Veldt...'. DC wouldn't allow us to use it, so we tried to parody it. We came up with quite a good parody, but the producer Non Morris phoned up Alan Moore and he came up with some equally purple prose from **Miracleman**."

One major disappointment was not being able to use the origin of Lex Luthor's hatred of Superman in the episode on 'Revenge'.



"I liked the bit about Luthor," chuckles Lyons. "The reason why he had this vendetta with Superman was because there was this school experiment which went wrong and he lost his hair and blamed Superboy for it. I hope after we finish this series, we can persuade DC to let us use their material."

Kersplat's early timeslot also dictated some changes in content. "There are some things we haven't been allowed to cover," reveals Lyons. "I wrote this script about women using stuff from **Tits 'n' Clits** and **Viz**, from a really sexist point of view. But because the programme is going out at six o'clock, or six thirty, that idea didn't get as far as the studio. We're hoping to persuade Channel Four to give us a late night special, so we can put in all the stuff we weren't allowed to use."

Lyons and Offiler both claim to be interested in comics, although from very different backgrounds. "I'm not really interested in superhero comics," says Offiler. "I'm into **Eightball**, **Yummy Fur** and **Hate**. A lot of younger fans seem to become compartmentalised into what they like. They only collect **X-Men** or whatever the current fan favourite is rather than reading other things like **Pogo**. We try to appeal across the board. For instance, Robin likes European comics."

"I wasn't allowed to read comics when I was little in case they warped my mind," laughs Lyons, who admits many of the Romance comics came from his own collection. "I didn't really get into comics until I was a student in Paris in 1970. I've become more interested since working in animation. My background is in Light Entertainment."

Kersplat is something of a departure for the Cardiff dockland based production company. Previously their productions have remained in the animated cartoon niche carved out for them by the success of **Superted**.

"We decided about two years ago to do things that weren't just animation," says Lyons. "We went to our friends Red Rooster and we developed all sorts of things with them. This is the first to come off."

"We have a researcher, Duncan McAlpine from Stateside Comics. Duncan is really good at the mainstream stuff. The first few episodes were written around things we were interested in. We wrote an episode a week. By the time we had got to the fifth episode, we ran out of comics and had to raid Forbidden Planet in Cardiff and the local shops at Jacob's Market and the antique shop in the Castle Arcade."

"Normally a script went through two or three re-writes. We drew up a list of all the stuff we could cover. There is definitely enough for a second series.

There's subjects we haven't touched on, like war comics and jungle comics."

Both writers hope that the series will attract viewers who don't normally read comics.

"The French are really snobbish about comics," says Lyons. "The good thing about that is that comics actually get reviewed in the papers. The bad thing is all this business about comics being literature for the post literate. That's b******s really. Comics are a bit of fun aren't they. Comics are to literature what Neighbours is to Macbeth."

"The good thing about comics is that they are trash," agrees Offiler. "They are stimulating on a very immediate level, but they have no lasting value."

Which is all very well, but one wonders what Lyons and Offiler would think about someone who described their work and livelyhood's in precisely the same way.

Siriol has a justly good reputation for its high quality animation and new projects continue this tradition.

"We're coming to the end of an animated feature film for family audiences called **The Princess and the Goblin** which is being made in co-production with a Hungarian company," says Lyons. "It will be ready for the Cannes film festival next year, to be released in cinemas at Christmas '91."

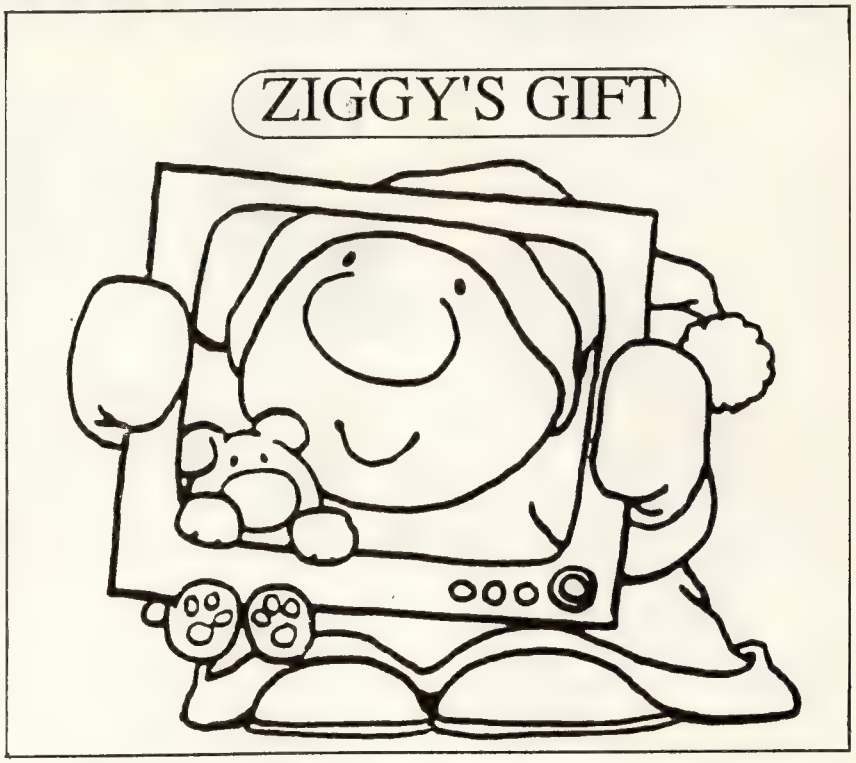
"We are developing an animated special based on **Under Milkwood**, using the original Richard Burton radio production for its soundtrack. We're doing a production called **Robert Creep** which is a Swiss comic strip for adults with very black humour."

Sneak previews of these productions reveal that the relatively small production company is able to rival the majors in imagination and wonderfully realised characterisations.

Comics may not be 'High Culture', but by failing to differentiate between the work of cartoonists and social commentators like Robert Crumb or Peter Bagge and journeyman hack work, the pair succeed in denigrating an artform and one that has close links to their own profession.

COMPETITION TIME!

Fantazia magazine in collaboration with **Vestron U.K. Ltd.** are giving away a whole collection of videos (packed in a lovely carrying case) to the best entry.
All you have to do is colour in the picture and you could win:
For Mum there's **The Whales of August,** and **Burning Secret,** for Dad, **Nick Faldo's Golf Course,** and **Nick Faldo's Golf Course Vol.2,** for brothers or sisters we have **Dream A Little Dream, Farewell To The King, Promised Land, Sieze The Day,** and of course for yourself there's more: **Ziggy's Gift, Banjo The Woodpile Cat, Peter And The Magic Egg, Oz, Perils Of Problemania** and **Poochie Special!**



All entries must be received no later than **31st January 1991,** all standard competition rules apply.
Answers marked "Ziggy Competition" to the Fantazia address.

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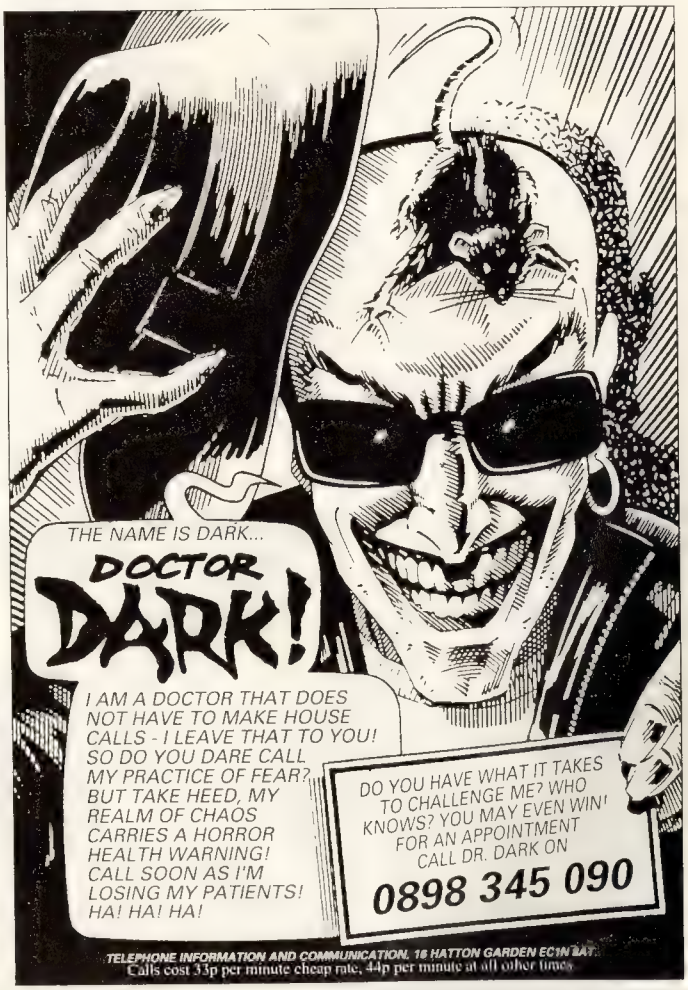
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The TICK

What's blue, seven foot tall and uses a viewfinder to fight crime? Give up? Sheldon Bayley supplies all the answers to one of America's wackiest superbeings.

STANDING, complete with antennae, head and shoulders above the rest, is possibly the craziest but most loveable character to embrace the superhero genre in recent years; The Tick is nothing short of a cult in the States, and with an ever-increasing nucleus of loyal fans in tow issues just keep selling out as fast as they can be reprinted.

The first issue of the regular series sees The Tick deciding to take a new perspective on life and to go in search of 'real crime' as a superhero. His aspirations lead him to start employing the aforementioned viewfinder in futile attempts to 'spot' crime as it happens. A totally accidental run-in with a bunch of Ninjas starts a five-issue plot line of Tick vs. Ninja which totally satirises the oriental art until it is seen as nothing more than an overcommon and almost laughable practice - with the public attitude being one of indifference, expectancy and a total lack of respect for the Ninjas.

Although this plot line is originated in the first issue, The Tick's exploits lead him into the life of another superhero in active service ... Clark Openhimer's nightmarish association with the jolly blue giant starts when he attempts to save him from being run over by a subway train, only to discover that The Tick is "Nigh-Invulnerable". The Tick plagues this parody of Krypton's favourite hero - to the extent of getting a job at the same newspaper as him, which turns out to be too much for Clark, especially after The Tick asks him to be his sidekick and tries his damdest to tell the editor Perry Beige who the 'Caped Wonder' really is. Issue two sees the end of this uneasy alliance and the consequent subplot.

Issues three to five inclusive revert back to The Tick's involvement in The Ninja Saga. In these three issues, The Tick helps out a female Ninja by the name of Oedipus and so becomes even more embroiled in the whole affair. Recruiting a fellow Ninja-hater by the name of Paul the Samurai, and an overweight office clerk desperately trying to seek recognition as 'The Moth', The Tick and his merry men stumble on, and through a series of hilarious blunders, spell the end for 'Ninja World', the mysterious 'Thorn of Oblivion' and subsequently the whole Ninja threat itself. The conclusion of this saga sees The Moth sticking with The Tick as his official sidekick.

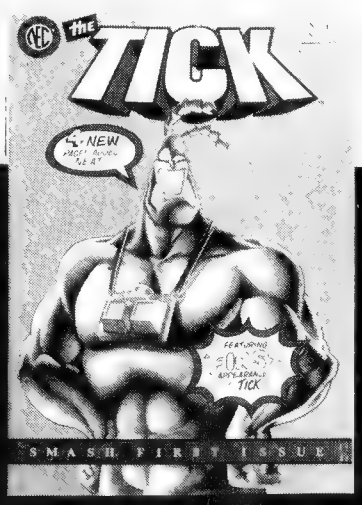
Issue six sees the introduction of The Red Scare - a communist super-villain who is the size of The Tick. All is not as it seems though - the villain has been paid for by another budding 'superhero' by the name of The Running Man (who neatly resembles another speedster of certain notoriety) in order to get himself good exposure as a superhero. The Tick ruins things for The Running Man by stepping in to defeat the Red Scare only to muck the whole plan up.

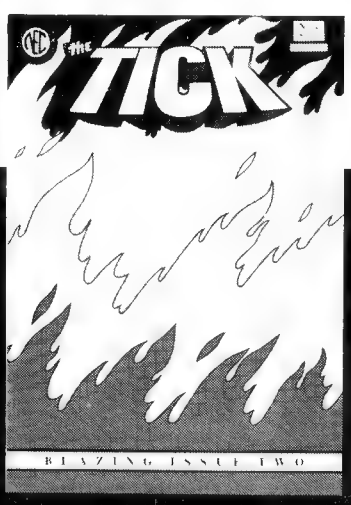
Issue seven takes aim at another satirical target. The superhero genre gets a rest as The Tick moves into the world of gangsters. A government agent recruits our hero in his battle against 'Chairface Chippendale' and his warped plans to engrave his name on the surface of the Moon! Again, a series of wonderfully funny mistakes on the part of The Tick means he emerges victorious at the end of it all, convinced of his ability and ironically his credibility as a superhero.

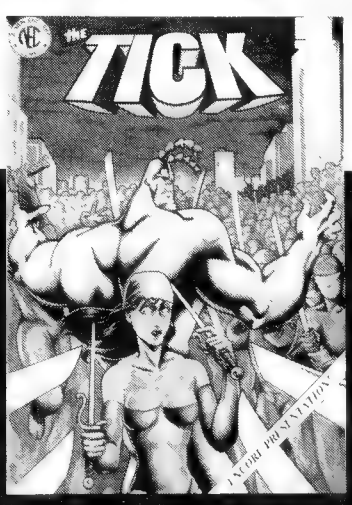
Issue 8 (July 1990) ties up loose ends from the issue before and tells of The Tick's last crimefighting days in his hometown. After returning to his sidekick's apartment, he faces assassination attempts from gangster types and eventually leaves the protection of his hometown to a man-eating cow! Issue 8 also contains an insert comic titled 'The Red Eye' which The Tick is shown actually reading in the strip proper!

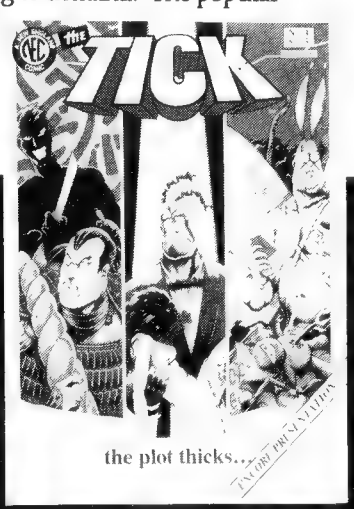
Issue 9/10 will be a double issue (56 pages) and will examine the exploits of the Tick and his sidekick The Moth when they move to New York "in search of real crime" by joining the 'Superhero Mainstream'.

Created by artist/writer Ben Edlund, The Tick made his first appearance in the **New England Comics Newsletter #14** way back in July 1986. Since then the character has merited his own title which has reached up to four editions of certain issues owing to demand. The popular









The Tick TM & © Ben Edlund

satirical character, perhaps inspired by The Roach from **Cerebus**, has also appeared in **Tales Too Terrible to Tell**; New England Comics' tribute to 50's Horror Strips, as well as having the first six issues of the regular title reprinted in a special Tick Omnibus issue entitled **Sunday Through Wednesday**, denoting the time elapsed from issue one to issue six.

NEC Newsletter #14 saw The Tick escaping from an asylum where he was being monitored by Muppet-lookalike characters. In the following two issues of the NEC Newsletter, there followed a strip displaying The Tick not only leaping but dropping from tall buildings, and a humourous illustration for Christmas, respectively. All of these early Tick appearances have since been reprinted in **The Tick** issues one and two.

By now work had started on The Tick comic and in March 1988 **The Tick Special Edition** issue one was released as a numbered limited edition of five thousand copies. This was followed by issue two in June of the same year which was another numbered limited edition to the tune of just three thousand copies. Issue 2 carried a cover that has never been used on subsequent re-editions - and so is markedly distinguishable from its later forms.

The popularity of the character had increased noticeably by this time and so **The Tick Issue 1** (regular edition) was released in June 1988 which reprinted the material from The Special Edition Issue 1 with some minor changes. **The Tick** issue one was reissued in March 1989, then again in June 1989 and finally a fourth edition of the first issue hit the stands in December 1989!

Issue 2 was to prove just as fruitful; in September 1988 a new cover contained essentially the same contents as the second issue of the Special Edition. Reprints followed in March 1989, June 1989, and December 1989 to equal the first issue in its number of editions.

Issues 3 and 4 saw NEC starting to use inserts as an active comic aid. Issue 3 (December 1988) contained a 'Ninja World' insert and the following issue (March 1989) saw the first Tick poster where Edlund shows the character coming up against his own worst nightmares. Issue 3 was reissued in November 1989 while the second volume of issue 4 followed just a month later.

Issue 5 (August 1989) was notable for its conclusion of the five issue Ninja saga, also an 8-page 'Emergency Filler Insert' and some of Edlund's pre-Tick artwork.

Issue 6 (November 1989) is the first issue to be inked by Dave Garcia (**Panda Khan**, and Archie's **Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles**) who has cemented what seems to be a good working relationship with Edlund, good enough it seems for him to become the regular inker on the title.

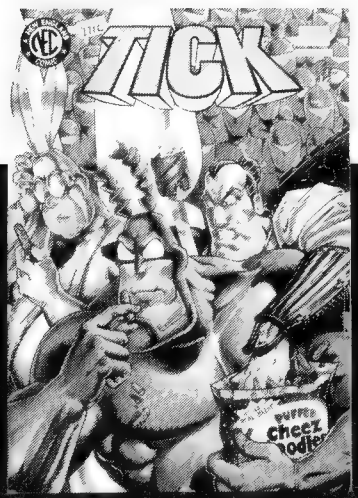
Issue 7 and Issue 8 appeared in February and July 1990 respectively.

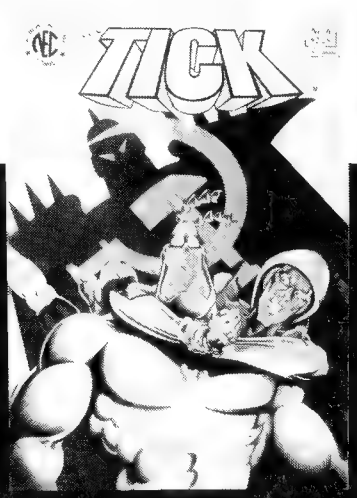
The success of the character in the States is not in doubt as testified by the numerous reprintings of the first four issues, the omnibus edition of the first six issues and spin-off titles from the series such as **Paul the Samurai** issues 1 and 2, again by the proven team of Edlund and Garcia, which follows the exploits of the character who allied himself with The Tick during the Ninja saga.

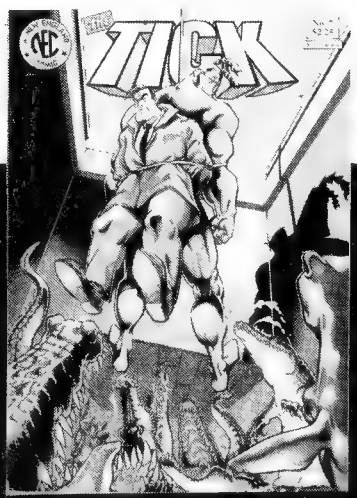
The Tick TM & © Ben Edlund

To compare Marshal Law to The Tick may seem to be inappropriate. How diverse can two characters be? However, both parody the inadequacies of the superhero genre. They just approach it from very different angles. Marshal Law is more direct and hits the idea home good and hard, while The Tick approaches it more subtlely from within the medium itself. As a 'fifth column' The Tick masquerades as the very thing it shows up to be inadequate in so many ways.

The Tick lies in between plain satire and straight humour. It has the best qualities from both sides, and presents a main character who is immediately and incredibly amiable. Edlund's visualising of the character and all the supporting cast strikes just the right mixture of exaggeration and realism. The Tick is someone who has only one mission in life - to be a real superhero, but in his pursuit of this honour, he ironically (and intentionally) presents arguably the most successful parody of the genre to date.

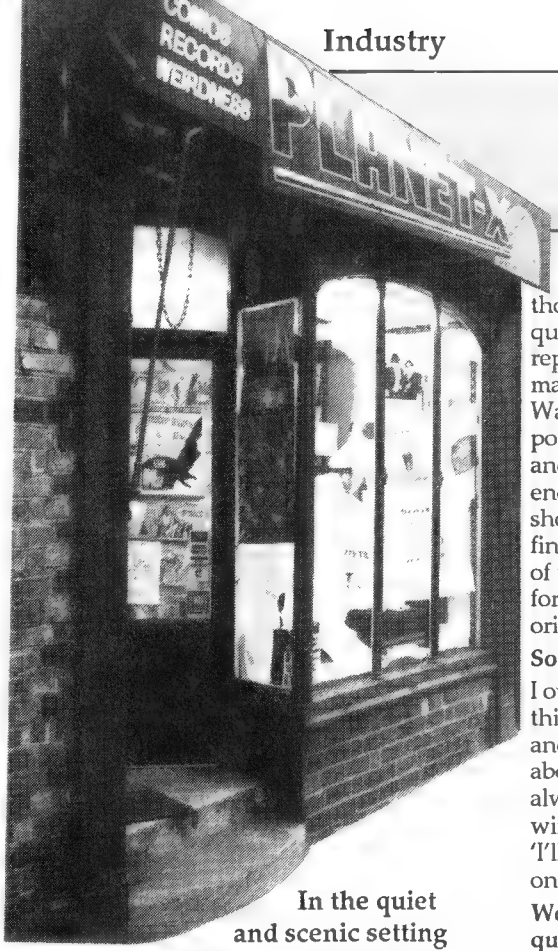






PLANET X

By Sheldon Bayley



In the quiet and scenic setting of Worcester, there's a brightly coloured shop called Planet X. It's an obvious sanctuary for the more imaginative natives and also the home base of a rather interesting and unique comics phone line. Sheldon Bayley went to find out more...

HOW did you get into the comics business?

I was originally a record dealer, I'd been a record dealer for a few years, and I met a guy from Jersey who sold comics, and he said "Do you sell **Freak Brothers** on your market stall?" At that time I was reading loads of comics, that was just when I'd started, around the time of **Hellblazer** 2 or 3. I was in the army in Cyprus, and I read something in a magazine about Alan Moore, and through the NAAFI newsagents I ordered **Swamp Thing**. I was the only bloke on the island who had it! **Swamp Thing** - you can imagine the faces when I used to get that through! I thought, I'll give it a go, and buy sixty quid's worth of **Freak Brothers**, Titan reprints, whatever, and sell them on the market. I just went round the markets in Wales and they were fetching sixty pounds, a hundred pounds, one hundred and fifty pounds, whatever. Eventually I ended up here. I originally had a little shop down in the Craft Centre, which finished up being three shops; I had three of the units next door to each other - One for records, one for comics, and one for original art and models.

So how did you move to here?

I owned a house which we sold to buy this shop. I wanted somewhere to live and work down below. Perfect really; about twenty yards to work. Someone's always there early, so I can lean out the window, throw the keys down and shout 'I'll be there in ten minutes - put the kettle on!'

Worcester has always struck me as a quiet place - What's the market for comics like here?

I've kept my expenses right down, I don't have much outlay, so perhaps compared to other places I can survive on quite a low level of takings. They probably wouldn't even consider opening a shop with the amount I take, but I know I can get by. I pull the people in from Cheltenham and Kidderminster. I take advance orders. I do mail order out to people and that sort of thing. I suppose it's not a big market really. I get a lot of college people, but if there's 500 people at the college I might only get forty or fifty customers from them, so it's not that much really. It's a big catchment area, but it's thinly populated.

I do a lot of posting of comics out to people in Ludlow and all over the county, or alternatively with the advance ordering, I'll save them all their comics, as they only manage to get in once a month so I make sure nothing sells out.

You couldn't go into the bigger shops and say "Oh, could you put this in a bag with my name on until tomorrow, like." I've done that twice today already because nobody gets paid until tomorrow. They come in and see something and it's "Oh, I've got to have that" so I'll put it by for them. You also get to know everybody on a much more personal level in a shop like this.

Do you see yourself expanding around the county at all?

Another shop? Well, it would be nice. I'd ideally like to move to a bigger shop in Worcester first, to get more stuff in really, rather than have two little shops. Then maybe move on from there.

Cheltenham is a possibility, there's Kidderminster as well, and over into Hereford. But I'm not thinking of opening another shop in the near future.

What titles sell the best?

Hellblazer and **Sandman** are the business! I get a lot of 'the travelling community' and that's what they go for: The DC Brit pack. Of course they're second only to the **X-Men**, etc, which are the biggest sellers.

What about the independents?

Aliens is bread and butter at the moment. I try to keep them in stock for ages, but never manage it. You just can't keep hold of any of it, at whatever price it just seems to sell out. I stock as many titles as I can, I've got great faith in the independents.

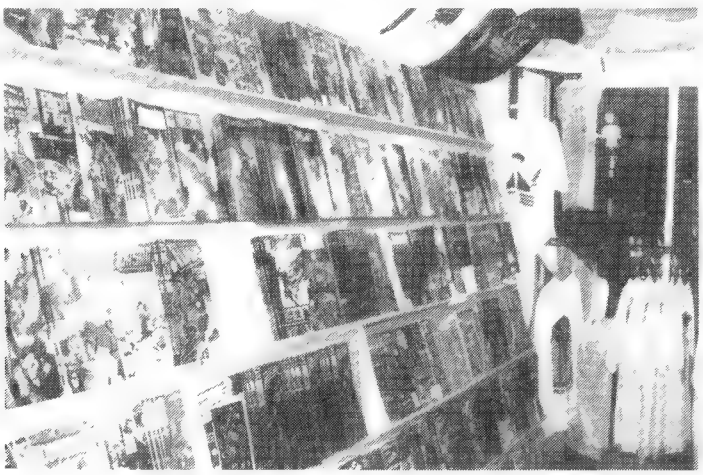
Any specialities? You seem to have a good range of T-shirts.

Nothing in particular, but I do like doing T-shirts, the import T-shirts especially, though I wouldn't call it a speciality really.

We *are* a speciality shop as such, and the way I want to go is to sell comics, I'm not into graphic novels so much, I'm more into long term investments really like Marvel and DC.

Where do you see the comics industry going in the future?

I think it's pretty good that we're going to be getting high street exposure. Comic



PLANET X

selling has been taken up by major companies now, but they won't have the depth or the expertise, so more people will come to the specialists. The more people you can give a taste for comics to, the more will come in. Which is good for people like me.

I'm not a massive expansionist dreamer, I want to expand the phone line and the mail order, but I'm happy sitting here in the comic shop every day. You've got to be realistic really.

Can you tell me more about the phone line service? What gave you the idea, has it proved popular...

I initially wanted to do a record collectors' phone line, but there's loads of problems there because of the sheer scope. But at that time the comic shop was coming on well so I thought it would be a good way to pay for the advertising. That was the only way I could pay for the advertising ... to get the mail order going. Out of every person who's going to call, I'm going to earn say forty pence and I was prepared to give that forty pence back to them by giving things away through prizes and competitions. You could phone up and two days later you could have something on the doorstep like free comics for example. The only problem is that people don't leave intelligible names and addresses so we can't understand the messages. We've got unclaimed prizes from last month's competition - We've picked all the names out, and we've written to them but the Post Office told us the addresses were wrong and brought them back. People must claim their prizes because it's not as though we don't want to give them away!

The phone line has proved popular, especially during the first month when there was a really good response: I would say we've broken even on it. This month's been a bit quieter but the advertising wasn't quite right. I'm hoping to expand the phone line soon, and to give away more prizes. We've got lots of ideas in the pipeline - I've possibly got a **Hulk #189** for a prize at the moment. But I would like anyone reading this to ring or write, and tell us what they'd like as prizes ... Would they prefer a two hundred quid book or would they rather have a hundred pounds to pick what they wanted. The possibilities are endless. Ideally, we want to give about 125 prizes away every month really.

The content of the phone line is constantly changing as we've developing it as we go along. Originally we had a set format which has now changed, and because it's one of these voice interactive phone systems where you get a 'menu' to choose from, we've been able to experiment by putting new things in. I've spoken to a couple of mart dealers and they may be interested in doing back issues with a sort of 'special of the week'. We'll earn the money from people listening to the call, the dealer will generate his money from the sales, and the fans will win too because the mart dealers are really cheap.

The phone line also contains shipping information and comic reviews, which we've actually just changed today so I'm not sure exactly how it's going to turn out. But originally we used to get a pile of the latest comics and read them out down the phone - a bit like the reviews in your magazine. That's no good though because the caller has to listen through loads of titles before they get to the ones they want. I think most fans want to know what's out and when: just the basic information. They either want it or they don't, and they just want to know when it will be on the shelves. So, what we're doing now is a more chatty piece, whereas we were doing it on what's going to be here next week (with the problem being when you sometimes don't get stuff on time) we're now waiting until the Tuesday or Wednesday, getting out everything that's come the past week, and sticking it all on the line with basic information like whether it's part three of four, or when it's a first issue or a double size issue, etc.

What I really want to do, is to somehow give people who phone the line a benefit when they buy their comics, ideally through the mail order service. To somehow give people discounts and benefits for using the phone line - that's how I'd like to tie it all in.

MATHEW JONES, Manager,
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5 London Road,
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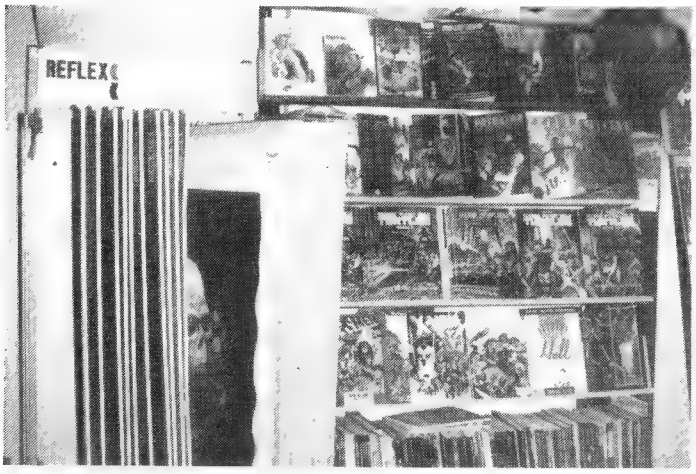
Tel: 0905 355055
Phone line - 0898 600 236

Mail Order and Planet X-Press Catalogue available on request.



BROADSYSTEM

The Company

Broadsystem Limited is Britain's leading premium rate telephone information and entertainment provider. The company started operations in March 1986 as the first national premium service operator and was runner-up in the 1986 Sunday Times/Arthur Andersen Venture-backed Company Award. Broadsystem offers over 1000 lines of sports, financial and entertainment services and generates over a million calls per month.

Broadsystem was founded by Stephen Kirk, its Chief Executive, with backing from Investors in Industry (3i), the world's largest source of venture capital. Jerrold Nathan is non-executive Chairman of the company. In May 1990, Broadsystem became a wholly owned subsidiary of News International plc.

Entertainment/Promotions

Broadsystem has established links with leading national newspaper groups, both BBC and independent national and local radio services and TV companies for a variety of promotions and information services.

One of the leaders in the field of in-paper telephone promotions, Broadsystem has carried this expertise across to other media with great success.

They are now seeking to exploit the new interactive technology with the development of high profile 'games' including the Fortress of Doom (0898 555 525), a game created and written by Joe Dever, one of the country's foremost exponents of interactive adventures in print.

They have expanded operations recently to include the development of promotions for outside promotional agencies, and have subsequently produced telephone competitions for Barbican Beer, Almay Beauty Products and Bryant & May.

Apart from producing a wide range of telepolls for the press and TV Broadsystem are now creating their own market research wing which will be able simply and effectively to provide clients with help in their marketing strategy and will, of course, also be able to provide them and others with useful database material.

Vampire Hunter

You are Dr. Marc Steiner, a detective with a difference, the paranormal Private Eye. You have been called to the set of 'Revenge of the Vampire' at Mammoth Studios by a worried studio executive, Ed Spielstein. It appears that some of the stars of the film have become victim of a real-life vampire, and now, the leading lady, Carol Chambers has been attacked. You must stop this beast from another world before it's too late!....

Tomb of the Sphinx

You play the role of Sir Edward Mainwaring, world famous archaeologist. An urgent telegram has arrived from Mustapha Salim, curator of the Cairo Museum telling of the discovery of a new chamber within the Sphinx of Chephren. He believes that close by is the location of the forbidden temple dedicated to Set, the God of Evil and the Night. You resolve to go at once to Cairo, to meet with Mustapha and to explore the secret chambers together, and together you make a disturbing discovery!...

Ninja

You are Akino Tomashta, the samurai Toda clan. You are called to the meeting chamber of your master, the Jonin, to hear that your arch rivals, the Yazuka, breached the walls of the citadel, Toda Castle, the evening before and stole the sacred sword of the samurai ancestors, the Toda katana. It is to you that the task must fall to regain the precious sword by infiltrating the enemy Castle Minamoto alone, to face your hardest battle...

Alien Intruder

You are Lieutenant Rick Sabre on a mission to link up with the space cruiser 'Intrepid'. You are under the captaincy of Captain Zabriskie who is completing the last of his various tasks before returning to your home colony planet of Terra Nova. One of the tasks was to collect a prototype proton laser rifle which is now safely in your care. But as you approach the 'Intrepid' something seems not quite right ... a gaping wound in the side reveals that someone or something has got on board the Intrepid before you, and that the proton laser rifle might be undergoing its first field test!....

Forbidden Tower

Forbidden Tower is the latest Lone Wolf Quest, which finds you receiving a messenger at the gates of your monastery. He brings news of new, strange forces at work at the Castle StoneCrest, previously derelict and now. ... children and animals wondering close by have disappeared, peculiar lights have been seen on the battlements and you have been chosen to face what seems to be another challenge from the Darklords of Helgedad ... Alone!...

The above scenarios were written by Joe Dever, the following game by the Editors of Games Master International, to be launched by Broadsystem in the New Year:

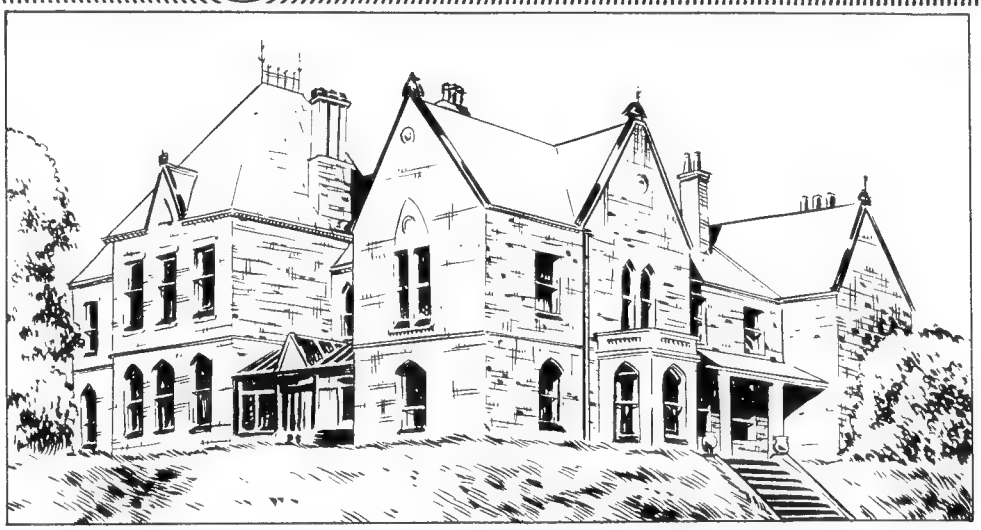
Desperados

YEE HA! Desperados is sure a space adventure with a difference!

The Space Cowboys are in town, and you know when you hear that it's a town called Malice, that this ain't no straight-forward story. It's a tale of derring-do ... gunfights and interesting barmaids, and the action takes place throughout the cosmos. Dial in, head 'em up and roll 'em out!

The Missing Window

By Phil Masters



THIS is a scenario for a small group of superhero characters, or a group of hero-level characters with an investigative bent, which involves them in a mystery in a village in Cornwall, in South-West England.

GM's Introduction

The basis for this scenario is some of the legends surrounding Glamis Castle, in Scotland. However, the setting has been moved to Cornwall for various reasons.

The PC's can become involved with these events in one of two ways:

1] If they just happen to be visiting the area, perhaps on holiday, they could pass Pengarron and its Castle by chance. If any of them have Mental Awareness or Mental Powers, they might sense some kind of activity in the village - perhaps from a distance? - and be interested enough to investigate; otherwise, they just hear of a death in the area, and then meet someone (such as Dr. Wells) who tells them of the odd circumstances.

2] PC's with backgrounds in medical science could receive a call from an old college friend, Dr. Wells. They remember him as a bright but not overly ambitious medic (details of the history are up to the GM); now he is apparently working as the local GP in a rural part of Cornwall (It's quiet, with lovely scenery, and even if Wells wants to find a more glamorous job later in his career, it's good solid experience). Wells remembers the PC, and maybe has seen their name in the papers; now he has a mystery on his hands, and perhaps they can help? (It may seem a long way to come on such a pretext, but Wells suggests that the PC's might also enjoy a holiday; he can put them up. Of course, if they are already in the area for some independent reason, and Wells hears of this, he needs less justification to make such an invitation).

The setting for events is a (fictitious) village named Pengarron, on the North coast of Cornwall, and the adjacent Pengarron Castle. A good guidebook will tell the PC's something about the place, such as that the village itself is moderately remote, and its couple of hundred inhabitants live mostly by fishing, with only a little tourist business. The area had a lot of tin mines once, but these are largely exhausted and uneconomic now. Pengarron Castle, on the cliffs next to the village, is actually more of a manor house; there was a "real" castle there once, but it was "reduced" by Cromwell's men after the Civil War (having been a Royalist stronghold), and only reconstructed as a home in the Eighteenth Century. As the locals will tell anyone who asks, the house has long belonged to the Trellaynes, a family who own a lot of land round Pengarron, and have a hereditary baronetcy.

The whole area is pretty in a windswept sort of way, with moors rising from the cliffs and a craggy coastline, and houses and "castle" built of local grey stone. The nearest town, Osvellen, is a few miles away along winding country lanes. The local people are polite, if taciturn (except after a night in the pub, the Miner's Arms, when they can become amiably loud), but the younger villagers find life boring, and spend as much time as possible in tacky discos in Osvellen.

The "castle" is today in the hands of Sir Michael Trellayne, the twelfth baronet. Sir Michael is a bachelor in his late thirties, whose main concerns seem to be looking after the family estates. PC's who meet him will notice that he's quiet and apparently unemotional; successful use of Conversation skill may determine that he's geniunely reserved and uncommunicative. (GM: treat as a normal with INT 15, EGO 18, and PS: Estate Manager on 15-). He employs a number of locals, full or part time, for housekeeping and maintenance work, all under the supervision of Raleigh, an old employee of the family, who looks (and is) in his sixties.

The mystery that the PC's discover is as follows. Old Mrs Dangerton, who was a housekeeper up at the castle for years, has just died. No-one's too surprised at that - she was in her eighties, and had been going a bit senile this last year or so. Dr. Wells was with her at the end (mostly alone, although a nurse and a couple of her neighbours were often around), and has signed the death certificate, which says "natural causes", but he isn't really happy with his own diagnosis. (If the PC's have far to come, he'll have found an excuse to have the body examined by a pathologist, and it'll be in the mortuary at the small hospital in Osvellen; otherwise, it'll be moved from the old lady's cottage to an Osvellen undertaker's mortuary a day or two after the death). The reason for his unhappiness is that Mrs Dangerton was actually ill with influenza, but she died when her heart gave out - despite the fact that her heart was, in his expert opinion, the strongest organ in her body (he'd been treating her for years). Furthermore, she had all the symptoms of fever, but her temperature dropped to normal hours before the death - almost as if she was beating the 'flu. (Forensic Medicine or PS: Doctor skills can confirm some of this from the body and Wells' records). Then there was the way Mrs Dangerton talked on her deathbed:

"I've heard fever patients before, and senility, but this was, well, too coherent; and yet it didn't quite make sense. *I won't tell them*, she kept saying, and *no, I'd never tell, I never have.* And then, right at the end, there was *he's your cousin, but you're worse than he'd ever be.* Earlier - well, she had been rambling then. *I knew*, she said, *even when I was a girl; I saw the missing window, you know.* And *the seventh*, she kept saying, even in her lucid moments, *he was the real seventh.* You know, this is a pleasant enough little village, but anywhere can have some funny secrets. I'd just like to get to the bottom of this..."

... All of which should give the PC's something to think about. Initial enquiries can go from there...

Rumours

The PC's may turn up some of the following facts, in approximately this order:

1] Mrs Dangerton worked at the castle for years - longer than anyone can remember. The Trellaynes were always supposed to be very fond of her, and she and Raleigh got on well enough. She wasn't rich; no-one profits from her death, or seems pleased by it.

2] The Trellayne house can't have been a happy place for her to work - "glum crowd, they Trellaynes. Never enjoyed their money". This all seems to be associated with the Castle and its occupants having a rather dark image, and there are tales of ghosts. However, don't play the villagers as superstitious rustics; they are country people, but they watch TV and read the papers and think of themselves as sensible. If the PC's seem too interested in ghost stories, at least one young villager will feed them a long, gory ghost story culminating in the horrible

deaths of a party of tourists, or offer them a guided tour of "haunted spots" (about thirty totally unremarkable locations) for "very reasonable prices"

3] Anyone asking about Sir Michael will be told he's "a real old misery, but then, all the old folk say that all the Trellaynes are like that". However, older villagers may say that he seemed "normal enough when 'e were a kid" - it must have been the experience of his parents' deaths that made him so.

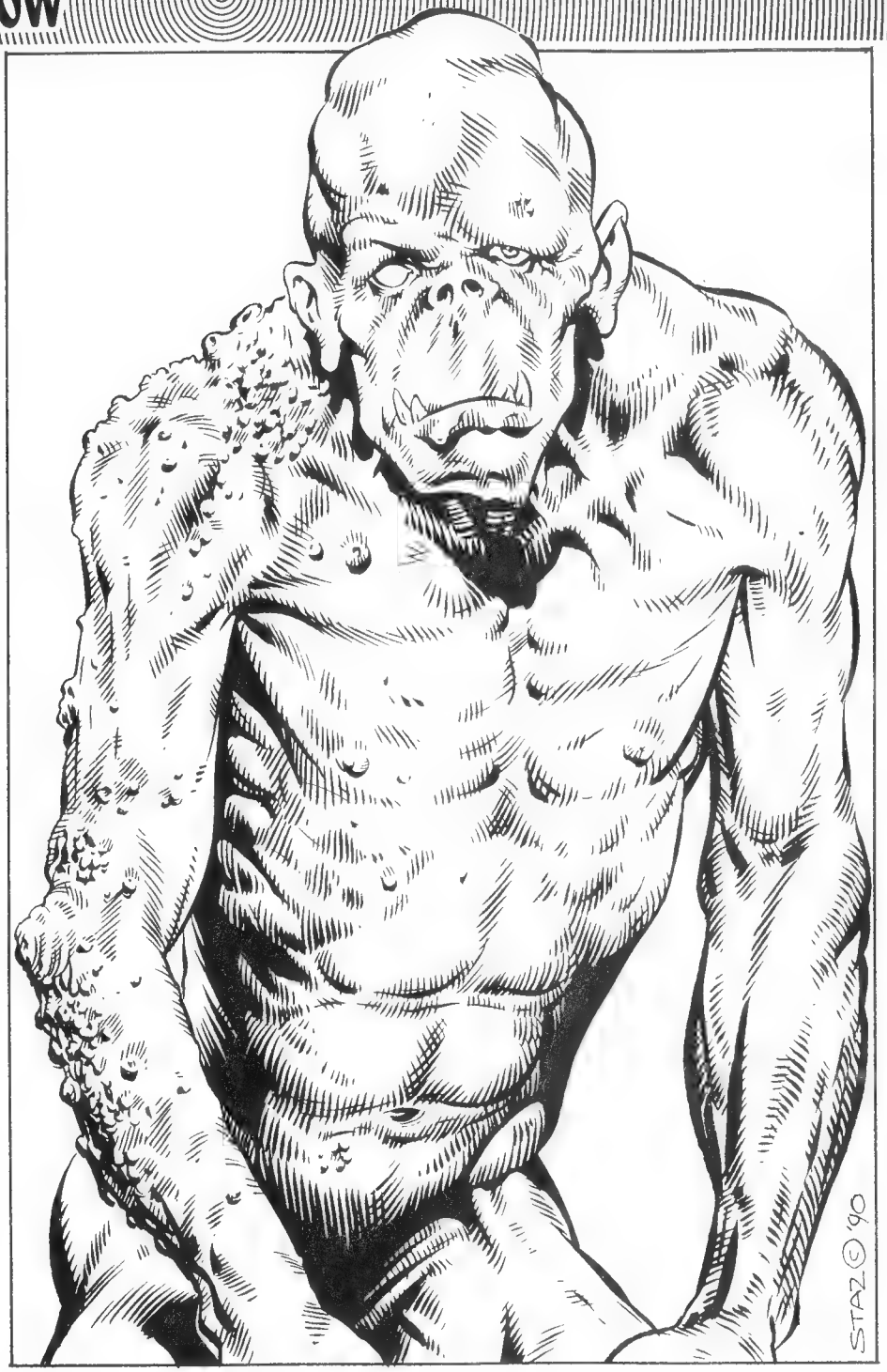
4] The Trellayne's may be congenitally gloomy, but Michael's father, Sir Christopher, the eleventh baronet, is remembered by the villagers as being a rather more wild character, much given to strong drink and womanising. Those stories are old enough to be treated as a joke now, but anyone from the Castle staff will get annoyed with people asking about them. ("The past is people's own damn business!")

Ghost Stories

PC's may wish to pursue the "ghost story" question, in which case they can (eventually) find local folk-lore enthusiasts who can tell them the old story.

"The story was that the sixth baronet - Sir Roderick Trellayne, back in the Eighteenth Century - he was a wild one. And one night, his poor wife was telling him off for gambling and drinking with his cronies. *Damnation, woman* he said, *I'll finish my game of cards, though the devil damn me to eternity!*

Well, that ain't the kind of thing a man should say. As the poor woman left the room, a dark stranger entered it, and sat down at the gaming table. Then there was a clap of thunder, and the room itself vanished, leaving the wife staring at a blank wall where the door had been. Mind you, they say if you look at the Castle late at night, you can still see the window of that vanished room, with a candle burning in it, and maybe hear Sir Roderick and his friends, trying to finish his game with the Devil..."



Hopefully, even a mystically-inclined superhero will find that a bit hard to swallow, although they might be interested in the background data. Anyway, if they ask about the story more than once, they'll meet a local history enthusiast who'll tell them it's double rubbish. For one thing, Sir Roderick didn't vanish; his grave is in the village churchyard, with his dates (1737-1788) on the headstone. For another, the story is a gross slander; all the histories say that Sir Roderick was actually a good, well-regarded squire, who helped the local mining industry modernise in the early days of the Industrial Revolution.

What's Behind It All...

Mrs Dangerton was murdered (surprise!) by Raleigh (the butler did it!) but the method was unusual and the motives go back centuries. The story is of potential interest to mutant super-heroes.

Sir Roderick Trellayne, the sixth baronet, was a clever, honourable man. He did indeed work to help the local tin-mining industry; most significantly, he travelled abroad, to study foreign mines and geological science. If a PC studies the details of his life, a Geology Science roll (or similar) might allow someone to recognise the names of some of the places he visited - as sources of radioactive minerals today. Other research, and a Medicine or Biology roll, might identify

The Missing Window

the cause of his death, from the accounts, as cancer.

But the radiation did more than kill him, it affected his genes. History says that his first child was stillborn (something quite commonplace for the age, so it hardly gets mentioned in the sources); his second child, a son, was the ancestor of the present baronet. Actually, the first son was born alive - *and still is alive.* He was a hideously deformed mutant, with phenomenal vitality, energy nullification powers, and immunity to aging. To save the family name, Sir Roderick had the child hidden, but he couldn't bring himself to order it dead, even if that had been easily achieved.

The child - the rightful seventh baronet, of course - was locked in a room, which was then concealed, and only a few faithful family servants knew of it. However, rumours inevitably got out; to defuse their effects, the family deliberately encouraged the "game with the devil" story. The room where the seventh baronet, known only as John, is kept, is hidden within the thick walls of part of the old "real castle" , now incorporated into the house. It has a small window, which can only be found by careful inspection from above, but, rarely, a light from there may be seen at night, as Mrs Dangerton glimpsed in her childhood.

Today, the only people who know of "John" are Sir Michael and Raleigh. The Trellayne heir is traditonally told on coming of age - hence their habitual air of depression. Raleigh, as a faithful servant, helped tend to the prisoner. Mrs Dangerton also assisted with this; when she started to go senile, Raleigh feared that she might say too much, and killed her.

How? Well, that's where the second part of the family shame comes in. None of the known Trellaynes inherited John's "monster" genes, but they <u>do</u> carry other mutations. These are mostly latent, and usually grant only limited psychic powers at best (something else that makes the family unhappy - unreliable telepathy can give an unpleasant view of human nature without being very useful). However, Raleigh is the illegitimate son of Sir Christopher Trellayne, and happens to have picked up a stronger psi talent than most legitimate Trellaynes (something to do with all the other Trellayne chromosomes in the village gene pool - Sir Christopher wasn't the first of his kind in the family). He learnt this years ago, and takes a perverse pride in serving the Trellayne family name by playing the faithful servant; he's a terrible snob, and bullies Sir Michael with his knowledge. He telepathically probed Mrs Dangerton on her sick-bed, and frightened her to death with Mental Attacks and Illusions.

A few of the older villagers will remember rumours about Raleigh's parentage, but it would take a lot of Conversation skill rolls to get even hints out of them.

Running the Scenario

This scenario should be played with maximum atmosphere. It's got all the elements of gothic romance - wind-swept cliffs, a cursed family, sex (in the past), violence (in the present), snobbery, a remote setting, fidelity unto death ... And mystery and a shock ending.

The quantity and quality of mystery involved is partly up to the GM (and how long a game is desired), partly up to the players. All the PC's have to begin with is Wells' suspicions and the atmosphere; if they and the GM wish, they can spend days pursuing old rumours.

If all you want is a short, sharp game, however, then the GM can drop a lot of broad hints, let the PC's use super-powers (such as Telepathy or Retrocognition) to link Raleigh to the death, then move on to the final scene. The exact power levels of Raleigh and John (and any latent powers, such as Mental Awareness, Danger Sense, or Mental Defense, possessed by Sir Michael) can be adjusted to the nature of the game desired and the power level of the PC's. Raleigh should be a competent telepath, but physically average and no match for the PC's as a group in open combat; John should be a lumbering "brick" with high defenses, and probably Mental Defenses and "Darkness" powers to prevent the PC's detecting him the first time they Mind Scan the Castle or use X-Ray Vision on it.

The GM should manipulate events for one result, however; a final confrontation in the Castle library, with Sir Michael and Raleigh present. Under pressure of accusations, Raleigh may briefly cut loose with Mental Illusions, generating horrific images that will easily explain why Mrs Dangerton's heart gave out, but he'll give up before being seriously hurt. Sir Michael will turn to him in shock, demanding to know why he did such a thing;

"WHY? To protect your secret of course, my young half-brother! You're weak, you know, far too weak to defend the name that you carry. I'm a better Trellayne than you'll ever be. But then, you and I know what a Trellayne can be, don't we?"

And with that, he opens a secret door behind a book-case. Naturally, this leads to the room where John is kept; John, agitated by telepathic emanations that Raleigh has been giving off, comes lumbering out, roaring with mental pain...

Maybe John could have been intellectually and emotionally human, given sympathetic treatment, but instead, he's spent two hundred years locked away. He casts Raleigh aside, charges through the PC's, and bursts out of the castle. Behind him, Sir Michael slumps in despair. A convenient NPC goes to him;

"Sir Michael? Are you hurt?"

"No ... Not <u>Sir</u> Michael ... Just <u>Michael</u> ... Him! Don't you understand? *He's the baronet! The seventh baronet!"*

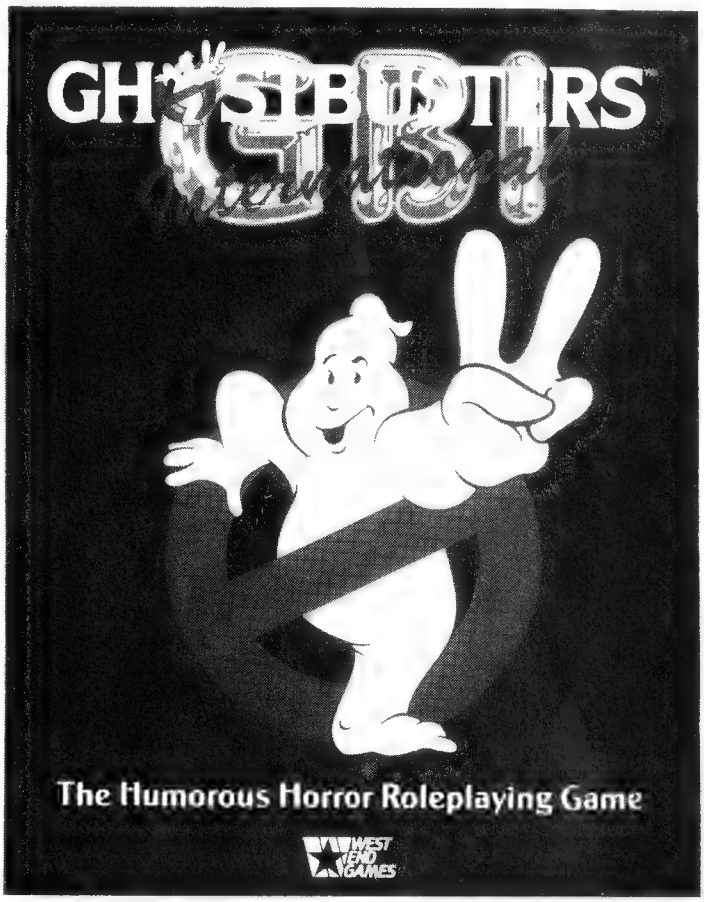
(Just in case the PC's are having trouble working out what's going on).

The scene is now set for a climactic fight on the nearest cliffs, at the end of which, John rushes a PC, misses, and hurls himself (or is hurled) over the edge onto the ghastly black rocks below - and the Trellayne curse is ended.

Unless the GM wants a sequel, in which case John can survive the fall and reappear later as a crazed but cunning and near-indestructible supervillain, ripe for manipulation by any villain mastermind who comes across him. And what about Raleigh? Did John batter him against the wall to fully fatal effect, or has he gone when the PC's get back to the library, to pursue his own career of embittered vengeance? How much will the press discover of the story, and what will it do for human-mutant relations? All this is very much the GM's long-term concern.

GHOSTBUSTERS International™

With West End Games' Ghostbusters International roleplaying system you can set up your own Ghostbusters International franchise and do battle with all manner of spooks and spectres. For those of you who enjoyed the films and want to create your own supernatural mayhem we take a look at the new improved system.



Ghostbusters International
West End Games: £14.99

The ghost is back as West End have released this, the 'sequel' to the original first edition Ghostbusters rules, but what besides the name has changed? Is the new game any different to the old one?

West End Games' standards are high, production quality is excellent, writing style hilarious and the ideas highly imaginative. So what have Aaron Allston and Douglas Kaufman done with the original work of Sandy Petersen, Greg Stafford and Lynn Willis of Chaosium? Well, the name has changed to tie in with the movies, distingiushing GBI as a fully-fledged organisation the world over, and the cute spook on the box and rulebook cover has also been changed, reinforcing the fact that this is a second edition. Curiously, the ghost on the 'Ghost Die' remains the same...

Wielding proton packs, vanquishing slimers and hacking through legal red tape, the players are on call, ready to deal with whatever chilling tomfoolery the GM (Ghostmaster) can throw at them. And now the GM has a revised set of rules to do it with, but how exactly does the game differ from the mark 1 version? First of all, let's take a look at what the box actually contains.

The rules come in a single 140-page book identical to the box cover, and look official, like a training manual more than a game, which is all part of the atmosphere. The print size is bigger, so you may not actually be getting as much as you think. Of immediate interest is the introduction, which justifies the game's existence and explains that so many gamers requested new rules that the authors felt obliged to update them with a whole new set. The book has numerous forms and documents relating to the GBI organisation, which again make great handouts and help to reinforce the tone.

There's also the Bride Of/Son of Ghostbusters handbook printed in blood red, which contains the usual "What is a roleplaying game?" chapter that we always skip past, a solitaire scenario to illustrate the basic rules, and the customary character sheets and official permits. Leave one of these in your car - looks great.

The typical ten minutes of play sheet is now incorporated into the rules, modestly updated and rewritten to make far more interesting reading. Then we're straight into the rules, exactly the same as in the past, only with a few added details, so you don't have to undergo an advanced hydrothermic PKE psyk-test to learn them. Again, West End Games have to be congratulated on another game which has rules so simple and playable, that roleplaying is actively encouraged and comes to the fore without really trying. The ghost die is still present - and the rules use a now-familiar difficulty number style which has grown in popularity in recent years, and no matter how many dice you roll, or when you roll 'em, one of them must be the ghost die. With the '1' replaced by a spook symbol, you quickly learn to avoid "rolling a ghost", when something really icky happens.

Throughout the game the reader is encouraged to think of a session as a movie, an obvious tactic in a game based on a Columbia Picture, and it's a great piece of advice for any gamer. The Ghostmaster chapter gives you valuable tips on how to improve your game and is helpful to novices and old hands alike. The book then goes on to explain the UHM system, or the Universal How Much? rules which the game uses, i.e: you roll a number of dice depending on your skill level, and try to achieve a difficulty total as determined by the GM, and always remembering to roll the ghost die in that handful. The ghost die is to Ghostbusters what the drama deck is to TORG - a novelty gimmick which really does spice up the ancient art of die rolling.

Combat has been redone with the introduction of combat rounds, dodging and actual damage rules. The latter are superbly simple yet accurately realistic. The more damage you take, the lower your Move, Brains and other traits get, so you get weak and slow, til you drop. Encumbrance rules (of a sort) have also arrived, and there's a whole new Big List of things to encumber yourself with.

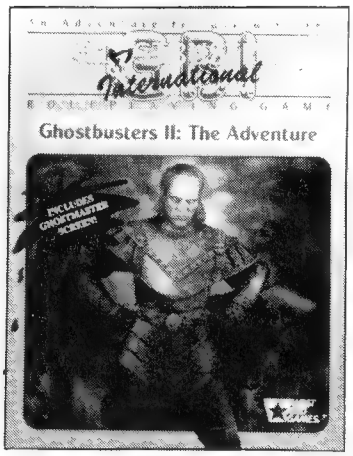
So now you've met the Busters, so what about the Bustees? The ghostology rules have also been revised, (a sort of Cthulhu Mythos meets Friend Computer) and are useful in any game, and as an example of the wacky nature of this game, the designers present an example ghost Rei, Priest of Uert-Hekeu, Shaper of the World (As It Oughtta Be), designed according to the rules, but they bend them to make the ghost fit. The authors suggest that the players get blank Ghost character sheets, and as they encounter new entities, they record them as best as possible on the sheets, slowly building a file of ghosts to refer to.

This game has so many helpful chapters on how to GM games, write scenarios and run campaigns, you'll use it like a bible. At long last a games company has really got the hang of it! And just to prove it, they even give you nineteen basic scenario outlines, just like last time. Some of these differ from the original book, but are still ideal for that quick session arranged in the pub last night.

In my opinion, GBI is worth owning if you have the first set, and a great buy if the game is new to you. It's not as good value for money as the original set though, which separated the rules into player and GM books, which may be an old convention but it's a better one. The equipment (Don't cross the beams!) which came on cards now comes in the Big List - give me my cards anytime. Handouts are fun, especially if the 'Busters get random cards. Strangely enough there's not a single still from either of the films in the new rulebook, stills which were everywhere in the original set. GBI may have more rules, but it's lost something in the process. Maybe a Free-floating Full Torso Vapour stole all the PKE out of the box in transit...

Review by Jonathan Clark

GBI



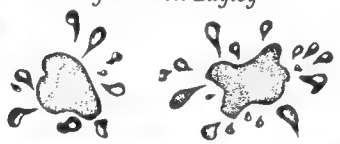
Ghostbusters II: The Adventure

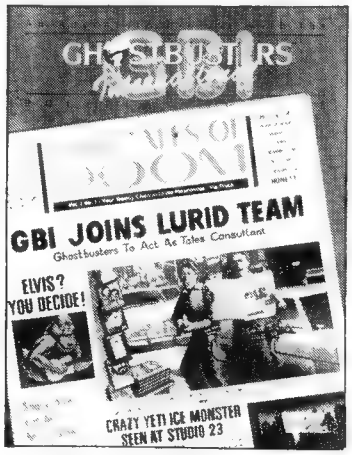
West End Games: £9.99

Ghostbusters II: The Adventure is a scenario which takes you through the events of the second film with one major difference. The original Ghostbusters - Ray Stantz, Egon Spengler, Winston Zeddemore and of course Peter Venkman, are locked up in the psychiatric ward at Parkview! This neat little twist means it's up to you to battle the ghostly villain called Vigo the Carpathian. For those who've seen the film - Vigo is the menacing figure who materialises from the oil painting. This scenario manages to capture much of the flavour of the sequel, helped enormously by the use of pictures from the film itself. It's well laid out and very easy to refer to during play.

Other notable features of this package are the 'Ghostmaster's' screen - which of course can be used during any GBI gaming sessions, and 3-D ghost cut outs for that extra touch. The screen itself contains equipment lists, damage tables, and tables to roll up your own ghosts as part of a very useful accessory to the game. However, you do have to pay that little bit extra for it.

Review by Sheldon Bayley





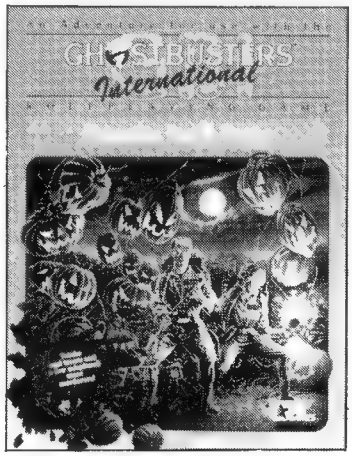
Lurid Tales of Doom

West End Games: £7.99

This GBI adventure takes the Ghostbusters into the realms of the press through a wacky supermarket tabloid going by the name of Lurid Tales of Doom. Read by 1,532 people every second, Lurid Tales of Doom is a newspaper that uncovers strange tales about Aliens, Elvis being alive, and other supernatural goings-on. As a publicity exercise the GBI Financial Officer has struck a deal with the publishers for the Ghostbusters to become regular consulting investigators on the paper. Not only do the players have to survive all the media hype, but they've also got to save the world from Something Evil.

An enjoyable scenario to play, this tongue-in-cheek look at the world of the press comes complete with front pages, headlines and real-life photos supposedly taken from the paper to use as player accessories. It worked very well with little preparation and so would be a good 'snap' scenario to spring on your players.

Review by Sheldon Bayley



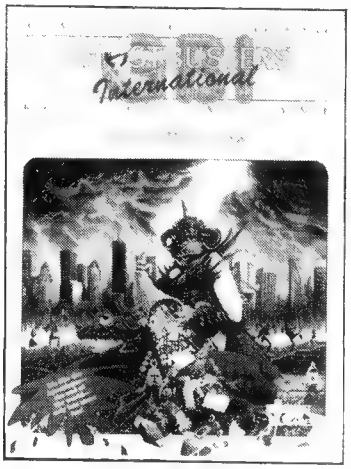
Pumpkin Patch Panic.

West End Games: £7.99

It's Halloween night and the Ghostbusters are on standby - expecting a busy night. Louis Tully, the Executive Financial Officer has even sent them all a circular urging them to put up the rates by 25% as the public will be more than willing to pay the extra. What the Ghostbusters don't realise is that this Halloween is *the one* Halloween this century, when legends dictate that a magical pumpkin patch will appear, spewing forth all sorts of nasty apparitions with one goal in mind - to create an Eternal Halloween on Earth.

This will be a testing scenario for even the most experienced Ghostbusters, and contains the usual amounts of hand-outs, detailed maps and funny illustrations to trick and treat the players with.

Review by Sheldon Bayley



ApoKERMIS Now!

West End Games: £7.99

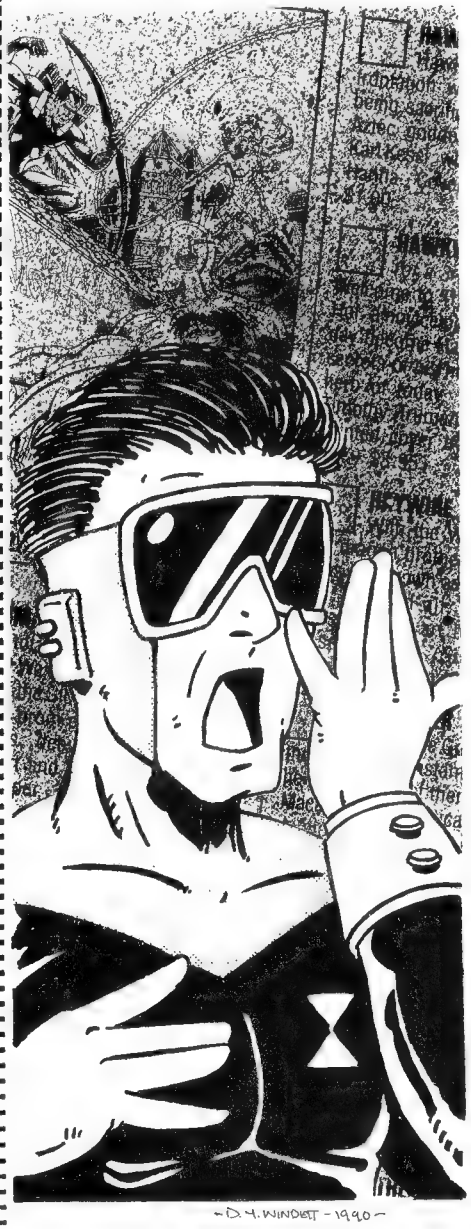
A local College Professor stumbles upon a dusty tome called 'The Big Book of Dark Ceremonies and Party Games'. He studies it and translates the work, but to his horror he discovers a prophecy that a forgotten race, who inhabited the ancient and unrecorded nation of Lonibabia, will return to put the world at risk. The Lonibabians became extinct through an unending series of Kermises (parties). Lilith the High Priestess of Party plans to return from the grave and throw the biggest Kermis of all time, a sort of Terminal Kermis which would result in the destruction of the Earth.

The Ghostbusters must stop Lilith from achieving her aim in arguably the best GBI scenario on the shelves. It is well presented and written, funny to read and hilarious to play. It captures that Ghostbuster feeling more than any other scenario, and has a concept that makes it both ironic and true to the spirit of the films.

Review by Sheldon Bayley

By Simon Burley

Methods of Organising Continuing Superhero RPG Campaigns



When running a Superhero RPG, most of us look to the comics themselves as a source of ideas. However, they can be a source of more than merely story and character ideas.

Way back in **Fantazia #2**, Mike Cooper identified one of the recurring problems with Superhero RPG campaigns, that of maintaining interest. He suggested a perfectly viable solution - running each campaign as a Mini-series, scrapping it after a while in favour of something new and more interesting. This, however, is not the only answer.

Whenever I'm faced with a problem like this, I look to the comics for an answer. After all, the major publishers have been printing some titles for decades. How do they keep the interest up? In this article, I want to suggest some possible ways of keeping your Superhero games fresh and interesting, many of which are drawn directly from the comics.

1) THE MINI-SERIES

I'm not going to cover this one in much detail. Mike's article in **Fantazia #2** covered just about everything. However, I would just like to add that:

a) It is probably best to plan a mini-series campaign as such right from the start. A campaign which builds to a pre-planned climax is far more interesting than one which slowly runs down from lack of interest.

b) The situation is analogous to most of the stories in **2000AD** where a strip runs for a set number of weeks until the storyline is finished and a new strip replaces it.

c) Don't throw out the campaign and characters. As in **2000AD**, you may want to revive, revise and revisit the campaign at a later time.

d) If a player really wants to keep a well-loved character, then it should be possible to run conversion scenarios involving suspended animation, time or dimension travel, allowing them to be brought into the new world setting.

2) THE SHARED CAMPAIGN

In this model, each player runs one or more characters in a shared world and also takes it in turn to Referee adventures featuring the other players' characters. This is similar to the way most people in this country used to organise their Fantasy RPGs and is analogous to the various 'team-up' comics (which seem to be currently out of fashion), such as **The Brave & The Bold** (DC) and **Marvel Two-In-One**, which featured a different combination of Heroes each month, often written by different artist/author teams.

One advantage of this model is that you should never run out of ideas. By the time one Referee runs out of inspiration, someone else will probably come up with a new storyline. You also get to know each others' characters intimately both through playing alongside them and refereeing for them. It's easy to design scenarios to fit into such a free and easy set-up. You know the characters, the adventures can be as long or short as you want and you don't have to worry about the long term consequences. Scenarios run by one Referee will often spark ideas for follow-up scenarios in the mind of another.

Disadvantages include the fact that the world in which these games are set will probably need to be fairly generic and simplistic ("Marvel in the Real World"?) with all Superpowers available to give the Referees the requisite scope for their various story styles. You can also forget any thought of developing the character's non-Superhero life and identity. Finally, sooner or later you are going to run out of excuses for the Referees' own characters being absent.

3) THE OLD ORDER CHANGETH

If you get bored with your characters, you can scrap or retire them and generate new ones to run in the same campaign world. **The Avengers** do this regularly, and I can't think of a team comic that hasn't changed its line-up at some time or other. One fairly modern alternative is to create a new team in addition to the old one in a different location or country - Europe, the West Coast etc.

The main advantage of this is that the players get the fun of generating new Heroes without the Referee having to rewrite his/her whole game world. Often, the new team are significantly weaker than their predecessors bringing the challenge back into the campaign and giving a new lease of life to many of the weaker villains. (Does anybody else remember the first **Avengers** changeover when Thor, Iron Man and Giant Man were replaced by Hawkeye, Scarlet Witch and Quicksilver?)

Disadvantages are that Heroes can come to be seen as disposable. Why put effort into developing a character who is going to be redundant in a few weeks anyway. Again, there is no incentive to develop their Heroes' 'normal' lives.

4) APOCALYPSE

If the characters are basically working well but the setting needs streamlining then the Referee can do a major reworking of the background whilst the players keep the same characters with only minor modification. Examples of this are "The Apocalypse War" (**2000AD**) and "Crisis On Infinite Earths" (DC).

This allows the players to keep well-loved characters whilst all the bits in the campaign which anyone doesn't like can be changed. Unpopular characters can be killed off and any Heroes who have had problems with, for example, a poor rationalistion of Superpowers, can be modified. However, the development of the characters secret ID's again suffers and the whole job of designing a new setting and plotting how to get everyone from where they are to where they ought to be can be an immense and complex undertaking for the Referee.

5) UNDER NEW MANAGEMENT

This happens regularly in the comics world, but so rarely outside. Take a popular comic or campaign which has gotten into a bit of a rut and change the author/Referee. The new creative team will come along with new ideas but will hopefully try to keep the best of what has gone before. In a game, the old Referee and (presumably) the designer of the campaign hands over all his/her notes to the new incumbent. That player's Hero is retired and a new one is created to take his/her place.

This is surprisingly effective. Not only does the new Referee have a clear idea, from the players' viewpoint, of what has been successful in the campaign so far, but often the campaign notes/description will provide them with a wealth of ideas that their original author will not have thought of. Disruption to existing storylines and characters is minimal; the swapover could even take place halfway through a scenario. The development of the Heroes 'normal' lives can continue and should be enhanced by the new perspective of the Referee.

Of course, the retiring Referee will now have to face the fiendish villains they designed to thwart the players, but this is an interesting experience in itself.

6) SHARED UNIVERSE

This is similar to number (2) above but is done with more forethought and planning. Before the campaign is started, the players should come together to design the campaign setting. An overall campaign co-ordinator is appointed, possibly a deputy co-ordinator as well.

The campaign co-ordinator is responsible for monitoring the development and background plotlines for all the characters (with the deputy co-ordinator monitoring the co-ordinator's character(s)). In addition, a number of major themes are determined around which scenarios can be written (e.g: an Alien Invasion). All players can write and run scenarios but should keep the co-ordinator informed of their general ideas. As well as running scenarios of their own, the co-ordinator should also run some scenarios which link together those run by the various players.

In addition to Superheroes, each player should also create a number of villains. Broad descriptions of these can circulated so that other players can choose to incorporate them into their scenarios where appropriate - being given the actual game details as necessary. This way, the same characters will recur from time to time in scenarios run by different people giving a feel of coherency and continuity to the campaign. Under the supervision of the co-ordinator, Scenarios by different players should develop from and feed off each other.

Sound complicated? Read the **Wild Cards** books. They're written in the way described above. Yes, it requires a bit of thought, a bit of work and a lot of flexibility and generosity, but the results are worth it. All the advantages of a campaign run by one referee with the variety of shared Refereeing.

7) ALL OF THE ABOVE

Finally, don't forget that the above models are neither exhaustive or exclusive. There are other methods of organising a campaign in a way that stays fresh and interesting - having a bloody good referee, for example. The methods above can be mixed and matched to produce a variety of effects. Hopefully, one of them will work for you.

At the Court of the Lord of Misrule

or It Isn't Clobberin' Time

By Alison Brooks

Even in the comics, Christmas is the time of fun, and goodwill to all: mince pies, trees, and fairy tales told around the blazing Yule log. Naturally, this requires something of a change of pace from the usual slugeramas, which are notable mainly for their violence rather than for peace on Earth.

IN a superhero campaign, this comics convention can translate into an excuse for a lighthearted or off-beat scenario. While your players might throw cushions at you if you presented them with the Impossible Man (from Marvel) or the Gweenies (from Champions) at any other time of year, at Christmas there is a license for this sort of silliness. If you're still dubious about the cushions, or don't want to give way to unbridled hilarity, you could simply use Christmas as a time for something different - like a ghost story in an otherwise hi-tech game.

One thing that Christmas scenarios shouldn't have, though, is fighting. Don't the characters get enough violence in the other 364 days of the year? Other sorts of action can be used instead - chases, pillow-fights, and showing off the PC's powers in non-violent ways. Peace and goodwill should be the overall tone.

Xmas Preparations

The simplest sort of Christmas scenario is designed around the characters' celebrations. Most gaming groups pay little attention to the lives of the characters, and Christmas can be a time to remedy that. How are the PC's spending Christmas? Together? Alone? What about their NPC friends and relations? Get the players thinking about the presents the PC's will be giving their nearest and dearest - and the other PC's. Having the PC's sit around giving each other presents can be a great way of deepening characterisation. How about the hard-bitten gunslinger who, when he was advised that flowers were an appropriate gift for his girlfriend, and that the flowers should reflect the recipient (orchids for sophistication, a rose for classic English beauty, etc.) gave her a cactus?

Characters who come from other places and cultures, be they non-Western Earth cultures, or outer-space aliens, will need to have the traditions of Christmas explained to them. Non-Christian characters may have similar festivities (e.g: Chanukah) and may or may not take part in Christmas celebrations.

A quiet, low-key scenario like this can occupy a game session in itself, or, if you prefer, it can lead into some other sort of scenario. Either way, it can also be used as a chance to introduce long-term plot elements. You can bring in the new butler who will later turn out to be an agent of SMASH; hitherto unmentioned relatives of the PC's who later become important; chance meetings in crowded shops which lead to new loves. It can even provide a chance for a new PC to meet the gang.

Me Character, You Player

Comics sometimes feature cameos of the writers and editors. In the same way, Christmas games can feature the players and GM. Perhaps they simply pass the PC's during an adventure, or maybe they are integral to the story. Maybe a problem faced by the players has to be solved by the PC's.

One way of doing this would be to have the GM go missing, so the players call upon the PC's to help in the search. (You may need to prime one of the players to suggest the idea!) The PC's and players then discover that villains have kidnapped the GM, believing that this will prevent the PC's from interfering with their nefarious schemes of world domination. Because the GM is missing, however, the PC's are unable to get through the villains' defences, so the players must come to the rescue, perhaps by applying real-world logic to defeat the villains' powers ("Well, you, Captain Nefarious, have a zap-gun which violates the inverse-square law, so that won't work, while Muggernaut couldn't possibly use his strength to heft a building without falling through the floor, and Psyko's powers are simply silly...") until they can free the GM, who sweeps the villains away with a twitch of a plot-twist. Be creative, be silly!

Charity Begins at Christmas

A good, heartwarming theme is bringing the spirit of the season to someone who would otherwise miss out. Since comics generally deal with individual problems and solutions (no-one has yet devised a way for Superman to end world hunger), this could involve helping an orphan in some way. Dickens' "A Christmas Carol" uses this theme. Do watch out that the charitable message doesn't dominate to the extent of making the game depressing or preachy. Keep it light!

Would the heroes help out at a charity show for the local childrens' home? It's a pantomime, children would love it, it would raise much-needed cash, and gain the heroes good publicity. Let the PC's decide on what panto they will perform, and which roles they will take, and sit back while they have a wonderful time hamming it up, and displaying their powers to the oohs and aahs of the children.

A hint of menace could be provided by the arrival of a notorious villain. Will there be a fight, risking the lives of all the pathetic orphans and destroying the spirit of Christmas? No! The villain, who had a miserable childhood, has brought gifts for all the children; and there is a temporary truce which extends to the Christmas party after the show.

The villain for this role should be chosen carefully. Perhaps he or she is reformable, or on the verge of reforming; or maybe this is an uncharacteristic spark of human charity which the PC's had better not rely on next time...

A Dream - or was it?

A weird scenario which may be real, metaphorical or simply a dream is another Christmas staple. The characters dream that they're magically whisked off into another dimension to explain the Christmas message, face mystical tests of their powers and heroism, or simply experience a weird place and meet bizarre, funny or beautiful people. At the end of the scenario, they are similarly transported back, unsure what has happened. But if it was a dream, what is that snow on their shoes, rapidly melting

into nothing; snow that's ... bright red?

Ideas for weird scenarios can be stolen from all over. King Arthur's knights were always running across castles where they faced moral tests, and which melted as they passed, failed, or invoked the name of God. Fairy tales are full of similar stories. Try not to use a source that the players will recognise, or else make a twist in a familiar story.

Moral tests might be based on a series such as the seven deadly sins (requiring the PC's to avoid the temptations of pride, wrath, envy, lust, gluttony, avarice and arrogant ones to be humble.) If they fail, the PC's should not be punished, merely made aware of their failure. For true heroes, this will be punishment enough.

Another form of test could be the contest of riddles. The excuse for this might be a Galactic Entity searching the universe for sources of novelty or a contest of wits. It might be a fairy-tale princess aflicted with the inability to laugh, whose friends beg the PC's to break her curse. It might be part of a weird quest, a victory in a contest of riddles being required to pass the Forbidden Bridge.

A more slapstick dream sequence might involve the invasion of the real world by cartoon characters. The cartoon creations, being infinitely plastic, cannot be harmed by normal attacks. Even if they're completely flattened by a falling piano or runaway train, they simply bounce back into shape. Since they can't be defeated, they'll have to be persuaded to abandon the invasion, perhaps with the argument that the real world is too boring for them to bother with!

Mr. Fantastic Meets Mother Goose

While traditional tales can be ransacked for weird dream scenarios, they can also be used more or less straight. Although most characters might be suspicious if a stranger offers them magic beans, and it can be difficult to get the PC's into the position of having to sell their old brown cow (or white horse), the story can be disguised so that the players don't recognise it until later.

After all, the magic beans (from "Jack and the Beanstalk", I hasten to add), are nothing but an initially unrecognised means of travelling from one place to another. In a superhero game, the equivalent would be a dimension gate or pre-programmed spaceship. Let the PC's blunder into one of these, and then have to deal with an impossibly powerful alien (giant) with murderous tendencies in order to escape back to their own home, and you have an updated fairy tale.

Other tales can be used straight - fairy stories about rescuing loved ones from fairy captivity, for instance. Fairy and folk tales from all around the world, myths and legends, famous and less famous fiction; all sorts of stories can be used.

One true story appropriate to superheroes at Christmas comes from the trenches during World War I. Soldiers from the opposing sides declared their own cease-fire and ventured out into no-man's land to swap food, carols and handshakes with their "enemies". This true spirit of Christmas could be spread by the PC's, arranging a lull or even an end to a war, on Earth or in outer space or other dimensions.

Famous fictional characters can be introduced to the PC's - Dr. Who, for instance, makes an excellent plot device to get the PC's from one place to another, as well as an interesting person for them to meet. If you do other sorts of gaming, a crossover between superhero PC's and a fantasy or *Star Wars* game can lead to unusual situations and interactions.

The Problem with a Silly Solution

The PC's are presented with a series of baffling events which have a simple but unexpected solution. In a long-ago X-Men issue, the X-Men mansion was

stolen, and the X-Men followed a trail of (non-lethal) devastation, via the Marvel offices, eventually catching up with the Impossible Man, who was on a scavenger hunt. The entire issue consisted of a scrambling chase, which kept the X-Men too busy to think about what was happening.

Nativity

If you can stand the sheer heartwarming sentimentality of it, the nativity story seems sort of appropriate to Christmas. The PC's might time-travel to Bethlehem to witness the actual nativity, or might take part in a modern equivalent by sheltering travellers and helping at a childbirth. Is the baby to be a new messiah, or is the message of hope implicit in every human birth?

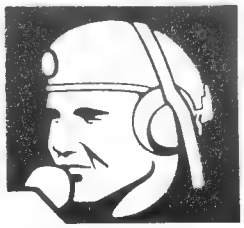
Ghost Story

Ghost stories are traditional at Christmas. Since you don't want to concentrate on fighting, the locate-and-destroy-the-vampire type of story is not really appropriate. In traditional tales, however, the spirit of a dead person is often earthbound, haunting a place, because of some unfinished business which can only be solved by the living. The problem is that most people are frightened of ghosts, and don't stay to enquire why the ghost is there. PC's are made of sterner stuff.

An example would involve the PC's being loaned an old house for their Christmas holidays. They get on with their celebrations, only gradually becoming aware of the strange atmosphere in one wing of the house. Eventually someone will investigate, coming across the ghost. Assuming that they stay to find out what's going on, the ghost can indicate the place it needs to have investigated. Possibly it is a floorboard under which the body of a murder victim was buried, and the victim needs a proper burial. Perhaps it is where a missing will is concealed, and the will's author wants to make sure her descendents divide her estate according to her wishes. Perhaps it is the hiding-place of the evidence which proves the innocence of a long-dead victim of a miscarriage of justice.

The silly, lighthearted, or off-beat scenario can provide a welcome change from the usual run of superhero gaming. This is particularly suitable for a Christmas game. The other time when this sort of scenario is appropriate is after a particularly stressful epic, when the PC's save the universe, or at least the world. A complete change of pace before the PC's resume their usual business of stopping supervillains from robbing banks and assassinating politicians.

WARLORD



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It is a popular misconception that all those 'gifted' with exotic, metahuman powers in the last century have turned to costumed crime or crime-fighting. Nothing could be further from the truth. There are almost certainly many, as yet undocumented, cases of super-humans who live a perfectly normal life, using their powers just to get by. And there are others, such as Silverfist, whose tale we will reveal shortly, who are pure showmen and wouldn't oil their hands with anything as dangerous as crime- fighting.

Silverfist. Starting life as a dancer, Louise Silver made her name starring in low-budget, mid-60's, American soft porn/ martial arts/horror films. It was here she met her charismatic Chinese *sensei*-to be, Sun Tao-Wong, who was working as combat advisor for the Little Dragon film company.

Sun started the young actress on a strict keep fit regimen, which included polishing up her basic knowledge of multiple martial arts. He insisted that Louise leave acting for the moment and concentrate on martial arts tournaments. Born with extraordinary agility and strength, it was not long before Louise became a name to be reckoned with on the world stage of performance combat. However, after three years she insisted on returning to films - against Sun's advice.

Her comeback picture, Silent Seduction, was destroyed critically in Hollywood, and, unable to face the public, she went back to Sun in New York with her tail between her legs. Throwing herself completely into martial arts, the following year Louise Silver challenged the legendary Iron Demon for the coveted Cyberblade, a mystical ancient artifact able to assume the form of any martial arts weapon.

Despite Iron Demon's ability to move like the wind and strike from all angles, Louise, using the fighting name of Silverfist, won the contest and her prize. As if made whole, she signed a contract with Tempoleton Studios for a series of 'masked avenger'-style movies.

With the millions she has earned from the Silverfist films, Louise has invested in a New York nightclub, FISTS, and a high-class, private club, HEROES. She now makes a living from 'Fist merchandising, and is working with top biographer, Vic Luxford, on her life-story.

Two major developments are presently taking place in the jet-setter's life: firstly, having recently discovered religion in a big way, she was very shocked to find, upon Sun's death six months ago, she was still able to 'talk' to him ... and others of his ancestors! Secondly, a major Broadway musical, "Fists" is in production and an album of the music has just broken into the Billboard Top Twenty. The musical is the work of the Skuffle Organisation, in association with the British LAW Enterprises.

On the other hand, there are those with exotic powers who DON'T want to draw attention to themselves, such as Royal Wells' nefarious Black Brothers ... and their 'Team'.

Controlling crime south of the Medway in Royal Wells, The Team are a loose collection of thugs running protection, extortion, pornography and smuggling deals under the guidance of brothers Matt and Mike Black. Matt, the eldest, is the brains of the organisation, but is cursed with a violently short-temper, while the larger Mike makes up for his lack of brains with almost superhuman strength. Both masters at exploiting peoples' weaknesses, they can communicate over great distances through telepathy and take great pleasure in inflicting pain.

Starting life as football hooligans, it wasn't until their first stretch in Maidstone gaol for assault and criminal damage, that they fully appreciated how useful their 'abilities' would be in the world of organised crime. Drawing together friends and colleagues from both in and out of prison, they started to rapidly and violently take over the city's underworld.

They run their business from a scrapyard in Southborough, but also have a large mansion in Penshurst and a number of flats in Pembury, which are used when people need to lie low. The Team have controlling interests in many pubs, clubs, cathouses, and casinos within their turf and help to launder cash for the American Mafia.

InterFace (thanks to Pete Gilham).
During the late 1960's, InterFace, a world-wide organisation was formed to counter the threat posed by superpowered individuals and organisations. Generally believed to have been the work of big business - afraid of interference by both 'heroes' and 'villains', InterFace was seen as a freelance version of the British SQUAD or, later, the Canadian CARD.

Largely composed of non-powered agents and scientists, muscle for InterFace was provided by the elite Metahuman Division and a handful of power-armoured troops nick-named HEAVY METAL.

One of their best-known operatives was The Steel Centurion, head of the Heavy Metal troops, whose state-of-the-art battle-suit could stand up to anything a supervillain could chuck at him. He operated publicly from 1974 and public specualtion suggested that he was more than one person! He/They disappeared in 1983 amidst rumours of a professional assassination.

Soon after, a combined American and British intelligence initiative against InterFace made its move. Several high-ranking members were exposed and prosecuted on both sides of the Atlantic for acts of espionage and terrorism. With this, InterFace quickly fell apart as its agents hurriedly deserted and went to ground. By 1985, the organisation was thought to no longer exist.

Character Creation Guidelines:

1] Statistics - in general people seem to be giving themselves above average statistics for no justifiable reason. The normal human range for physical abilities is between 20 and 90, with the higher end of the scale being Olympic standard. Please remember that while you are free to give what scores you like in statistics, you must be able to justify them or your GM is quite within his rights to just hack points straight off.

2] Martial Arts - it seems people see martial arts as a useful 'tack on' to any character, not taking into account the amount of discipline and effort it actually takes to develop martial arts to a level where you are really more dangerous to your opponent than you are to yourself.

It is one thing for characters who are purely martial artists, but for a character who can move mountains or melt tower blocks with his heat vision ask yourself: Is It Really Necessary?

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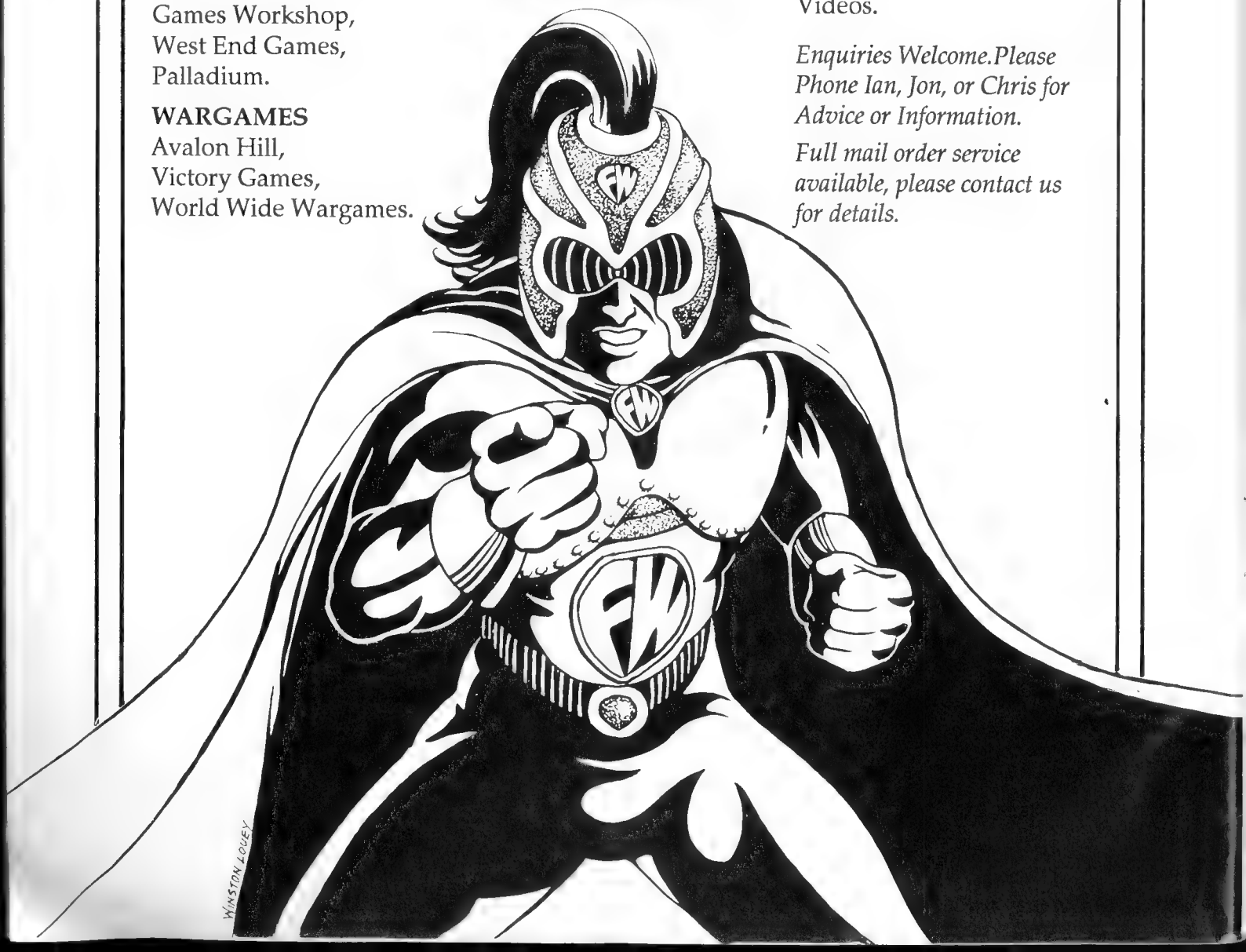

Apocalypse Inc.

An ongoing tale of daring-do by J.K.Spence.

6.] The Park of Sombre Fountains

WARPATH was old. He wore the time well, but in recent years he felt its passing's toll. He felt muscle move over muscle as if oiled in sand, and when he reached inside himself he found progressively less. He had hoped to dwindle to a man after the war, but circumstances forbade his retirement, and in the end the anonymity which would have saved his body, though not his soul, was reserved for the lesser men who watched his life on headlines. In the steady light of his workshop he pondered the twists of his seventy-five year life, while his trained hands broke the action on the antique Webley. The still air held the gun oil's aroma, lingering, inciting the memories. Warpath fed each round into its chamber, snapped the gun closed and swung round in his chair levelling his revolver at the man who had entered behind him.

"Hey! It's me ... Torus. I flew over to see how you were. Vector said you had some anniversary on your mind."

Warpath didn't move the gun, and the lines on the negro's face tightened.

"OK Charles let's play that game; you're fast, but I'm willing to bet I could slag the bullets, the gun, and you, before you could react."

The old man smiled.

"Not on the best day of your life Ray, not on the best day of your life."

He slid the pistol in his belt holster, and thumbed the flap closed.

"Yes, you're right it's an anniversary. Fifty years ago to this day, in the Autumn of 1942. I met a man ... to paraphrase your favourite singer ... a man of constant evil. His name was Scheibe, though I found out later he went by more names than he had stolen faces. He always liked Sadric, but I never found out if that was his real name. He was older, older than me anyway, but he showed no signs of ageing, unless you count the scars."

"Scars?" Torus looked confused, heating the water for coffee with a sweep of super-heated air.

"Thin white lines, unnoticeable, always healing, never healed, always in different places. I found out later he replaced his own organs as they failed. His original body was a mess after an accident at the I. G. Farben plant."

"Huh?"

Warpath smiled. "and you a scientist. It was the Germans' main gas supplier in World War I."

Torus turned and handed Warpath his coffee."Thanks, anyway, he led the German super soldiers in the second world war. God they were wild, leave the crowd we fight standing. Powers like the risen man, and not a coward among them."

"Guess all the yellow streaks ran through the Italian efforts, 7 reverse gears and all that?"

"Never met an enemy Italian superhero, they all seemed to be on the side of the partisans, and there wasn't a coward amongst them. One of them, Innominato he was called ... I'm getting off the point Ray. Sadric created a team that would have marched across Europe by themselves if it hadn't been for the Paladins."

"And the Alliance."

"They just messed about in the Pacific, big body stockings and too many fliers was about all you could say for the Alliance. Not like us, Lightstrike was the only one who could fly."

"So how'd you all get around?"

"We walked, that is, until Valour's Minion turned up."

"Valour's Minion?"

"A tank. A truly beautiful great terror of a tank. Left stains where Panzers had been, and had a gun that would have given Gammadion pause."

"Who?"

"Living image of Excelsior, chin like a quarry."

"So what's the punchline, my friend?"

"The punchline is, my physicist friend, that even though I nailed Aryan's hide to the wall, I never got Sadric. I've been worrying about it ever since."

"Sure. He's just a villain, and we're a truckload more powerful than the Paladins, so if some decrepit old Nazi turns up and starts putting himself about, we'll take him down so hard he won't know the War's over."

"I hope so Ray, I truly hope so; because it was only when the devil smiled that Sadric's lips moved."

****

The body of the Psychiatrist was slumped forward on the desk by the time his junior partner had come in in the morning.

Medically trained, he didn't panic when he saw his old friend's condition. He didn't panic when he could find no pulse. It was only when he drew the body back in the chair, and saw a neat hole an inch in diameter, and realised his partner's chair was sitting on a pool of blood that he began to panic. He was still panicking when his trembling fingers stabbed 911. Then he stopped panicking, because a razor-sharp cleaver had completely severed his head from his body. As the desk sergeant talked to deaf ears, the cleaver was wiped on a stained grey cloth, smearing fresh red on the greasy rag.

"... Tear along the dotted line."

A powerful figure carrying a long spear walked out of an adjoining room.

"I got it Abs, let's blow."

****

As Jack Jones, AKA The Man Mountain, he weighed in at 514 lbs., measured a whisker away from 8 feet tall, and launched himself periodically from the top rope, in the field of professional wrestling. As Macrobe, he weighed an inestimable amount, regularly towering over 500 feet tall, and wasn't often to be seen in the arena of any professional sport. His skills as a wrestler were often tested in his capacity as a hero, and his skills as an actor were even more regularly tested as he tried to make his way in the world of organics. He wasn't at the moment concerned about anything else other than the upcoming edition of "Ring Wars", and his ongoing feud with the Lumberjacks. He hadn't a care in the world, neatly demonstrating his complete lack of prescience. For as he laboured hour after hour to become, or rather to stay in the eyes of the people, human; he had no idea that another worked in the mirror of his endeavours, striving organ by organ, wire by wire, to beome a machine. His name was Psiborg, and his total meglomania was his most endearing trait.

****

Swathed in his tattered black robes, the emissary walked across the busy street to the headquarters of his greatest enemies. The black cancer had spread far across his talisman, prompting action unheard of in the annals of the great game. His name was Erebus, the son of night and hell. He was the face of evil, and he had decided he must join American Express.

"We are thus driven to the unfashionable conclusion that the trouble with our species is not an excess of aggression, but an excess capacity for fanatical devotion."

Arthur Koestler

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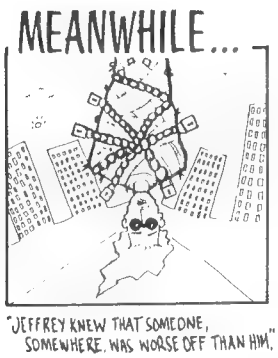

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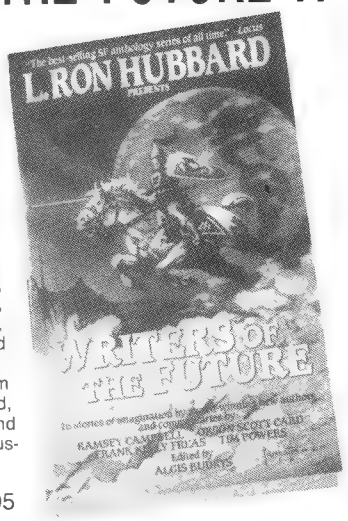

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BOOKS REVIEWS

A Christmas Carol

First/Berkley: $3.75 52pp.

This classic has been denigrated too often into a whimsical fantasy-period piece where good wins through in the end. As Charles Dickens intended, like many of his works, it demonstrates the injustices of the society he lived in, a problem unfortunately our modern world has not corrected in the intervening years.

I am pleased to announce, Joe Staton, the adapter of this piece into graphic story form, conforms to the original *spirit* of the text.

Those aware of his work, might fear his cartoony approach could sentimentalise the piece, but Mr. Staton does not. True, he caricatures to a degree in his figures, but merely to emphasise the working emotions. I will assume he enjoyed working on the adaption, or bust his ass to do a good job. Either way the results are worthy.

Review by Paul H. Birch

The Fall of the House of Usher

First/Berkley: $3.75 52pp.

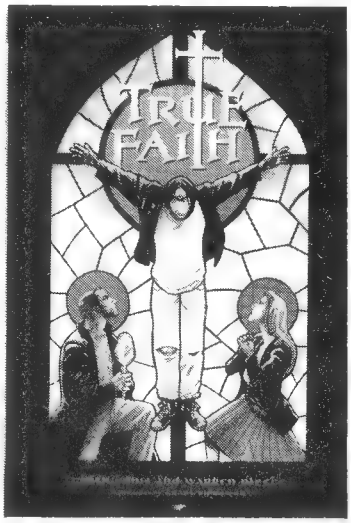
The work of H. P. Lovecraft and Edgar Allan Poe have quite possibly been adapted into comic form more than any other creators in the world, no doubt because their texts inspired stirring visuals within the mind of the reader.

I confess to having enjoyed a great deal, if that is the correct term, of Poe's work from which this is adapted, but am probably jaded by all the adaptions that have appeared especially of this story. For those unaware the House of Usher sees the last of its lineage slowly die, in an eerie manner, the fault of aristocratic inbreeding. The story is related by an unamed friend of Roderick Usher, and it is a dark romance, full of madness and tinged with sadness.

As earlier stated, I know the story too well to be affected by it, but I will say this for the presentation; the adaption and layouts (or pencils) have been contributed by P. Craig Russel, his sense of design being very appropriate for the piece, whilst the finished artwork has been rendered by Jay Geldhof.

This was a sound decision, for Russel can be too ornate in his actual panels, which can hinder storytelling, and Geldhof gives just enough to make this not the case.

Review by Paul H. Birch



True Faith

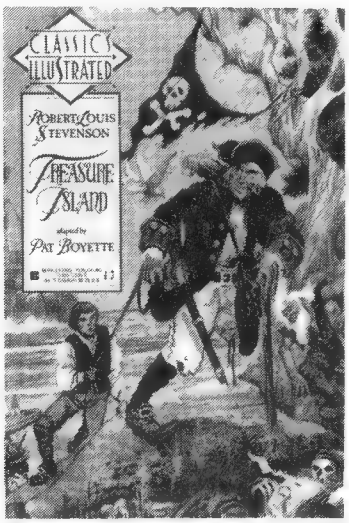
Fleetway: £5.95 98pp.

True Faith is both poignant and potent, and presents us with another tale from the immensely talented Garth Ennis. It portrays a disturbing cycle of events in modern London where various disillusioned Christians strike back against their faith by firebombing churches. Caught up in the middle of this madness are two principal characters; a youth by the name of Nigel Gibson and an insane salesman called Terry Adair. Both have become disenchanted with religion and its seeming hypocrisy - their alliance reminded me of the similar youth/fanatic combination which Ennis used in 'Troubled Souls'.

Ennis doesn't pull his punches and so **True Faith** showcases so many observations on modern day life. The 'couch potato' parents who exist in a state of zombification, the young impressionable kid, the anti-religious fanatics, and the somewhat corrupt government and S.A.S.

Artist Warren Pleece, having proved his talents in 'Velocity' turns in some equally powerful and thoughtful work, with artwork that doesn't always need captions to create sound! His characterisation is studious and his imagery proves a welcome combination with Ennis' writing. This one's a modern day tragedy - Read it with this in mind.

Review by Sheldon Bayley

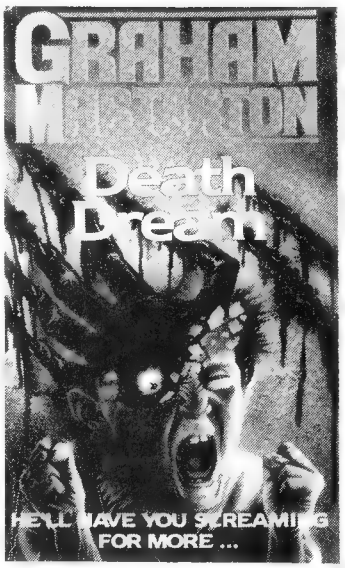


Treasure Island

First/Berkley: $3.75

Robert Louis Stevenson's rip-roaring adventure yarn has been adapted by Pat Boyette, whom one could never describe as having been a 'fan favourite', but he's had his admirers over the years, myself included.

Kids will hopefully enjoy the escapism of the piece, those who look at it more closely might acknowledge there's rather a grey area concerning the good guys and the bad, that questions all of humanity's greed.



Death Dream

Graham Masterton

Sphere: £3.99 383pp.

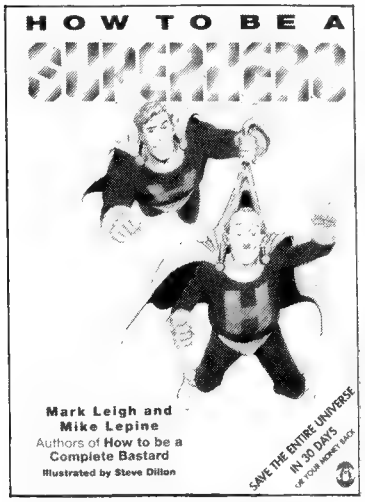
At first glance this appears to be a typical 'hack and slash' horror book, but upon reading it turns out to be highly enjoyable. Revolving around John Woods and his 9-year-old son Lenny, who has become host to a nightmare killer who lives in his dreams and materialises into the real world when Lenny is asleep, slashing anyone within reach to pieces before disappearing back into his dreamworld.

His first victim is John's second wife Jennifer, and while trying to prevent the attack John himself sustains injuries enough to paralyse him from the neck downwards. While convalescing in hospital John and his friends, (all paraplegics) are visited by a being calling himself Paul Springer who informs them they are the descendants of a race called the Night Warriors who had the ability to enter into people's dreams and do battle with the creatures that inhabited them. In this guise the group are all able to walk and move about freely, and each takes on a new personality posessing abilities which enable them to fight the creature in Lenny's dreams.

An excellent read, as the plot involves a variety of circumstances, emotions and insights into the lives of paraplegics. The contrasts between the real life struggles of

John and his role as a night Warrior gel well, and even the happily ever after ending isn't too corny.

Review by Sara Bayley



How To Be A Superhero
Mark Leigh & Mike Lepine, illustrated by Steve Dillon.
Penguin: £4.99 180pp.

A well priced little reference book, to be purchased as Xmas presents, for all those whom after eating turkey until they're sick, watch whichever **Superman** film they'll be playing over the holdiay period, and decide they wouldn't mind flying about and saving the odd damsel in distress.

The book is split into different sections, such as secret identities, whether to opt for a sidekick or not, etc... To get the best out of it, I suggest you read it over a period of days (or weeks if you're a slow reader) and you will find it most amusing. There are sections where the humour can be obvious, and this way deletes that feeling to a degree.

Steve Dillon might be parodying the superhero in these pages, but he actually turns in some splendid illo's and panel narratives, that make one look forward even more to his stint on **Animal Man**.

Whether you're down on superheroes or read nothing but comics wise, you'll find this a rib-tickling read.

Review by Paul H. Birch

Batman 3-D
DC: b/w preview copy

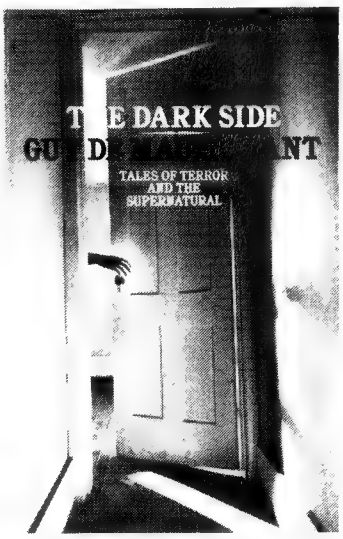
It's quite common to knock John Byrne's work these days. He has an attractive cartoon flavour to his art and understands that superhero comics in the main are *intended* for kids - This is where he succeeds, he's commercial and he knows how to play the game.

Onto his part of this comic - I'm reading from a 2-D version. Let's get the bad points out of the way: I'm not keen on his version of the Joker, maybe it's Dick Sprang influenced (?) but it doesn't go with the rest of his style, the Riddler's Puzzles can only be worked out by Batman or Gordon, this leaves reader involvement, i.e: the fun of guessing, out the window.

Onto the good bits: Byrne's thought about the 3-D approach, and he's put in eye-catching backgrounds, made nice use of perspective and used his panel designs to integrate well. The plot hurtles along in a very pleasant James Bond fashion (there's even what I take to be a Bond parody).

This packaged with the original 3-D Batman story and pin-ups should be a good read of honest escapism for kids to get their paws on, I hope it's not too pricey for them.

Review by Paul H. Birch



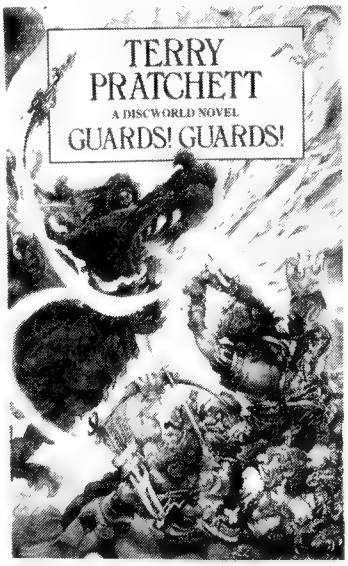
The Dark Side
Guy De Maupassant
Cardinal: £4.99 252pp.

A collection of 31 short stories ranging from the macabre to the bizarre, with a predilection for the horrors of the deranged mind, large men and peasants.

Selected and translated by Arnold Kellet, the introduction is worth a glance for the background of the author, previously unread by myself, while the tales themselves range from the absorbing to the seemingly pointless. Although the collection has a disturbing, if understandable, focus on the insane, it made a refreshing change from the pulp sanitised insanity from some of the more modern authors... I can see them laughing now as they put another tome by ? on my desk... and as they keep telling me, I do have a marked preference for gravediggers.

Also liked about the book were the notes at the back ... precis of the 'contes' and 'nouvelles', it even improved my French! If you too have not yet discovered this author, look him out - I will be.

Review by Christine Ashford



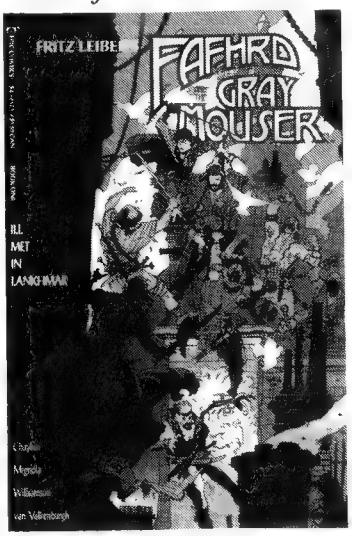
Guards! Guards!
Terry Pratchett
Corgi: £3.99 317pp.

This latest Discworld novel from the mind-boggling inventive genius we all know and love heralds a return to the peak of his form (which, I feel, slipped a little with some of his more recent work). This book manages to work in references to about five genres other than fantasy in its humourous content, which is quite a trick.

The story is that Ankh-Morpork's City Watch finally (with the aid of a new member) decide to do their job. At the same time, there is a plot to reinstate the monarchy under the control of a secret society, who are going to summon a dragon to help bring this plan into effect. With the help of the Librarian of Unseen University and the last of one of Ankh-Morpork's ruling families the action is hectic - and very, very funny.

With this, Terry Pratchett once more proves his right to be the clown prince of fantasy - without even any hint of long-lost scions! Highly readable.

Review by Gerard Birkill



Fafhrd and the Gray Mouser Book One
Marvel/Epic: £3.15 approx. 52pp.

Taken from Fritz Lieber's swashbuckling duo, **Fafhrd and the Gray Mouser** is an ornate tale of honour, love and revenge set in the mythical city of Lankhmar. Two warriors, cast from the same mould, are thrown together by circumstance and form a team to fight against the Thieves' Guild. Lieber's world is intricately authentic with its use of colloquial colour, convincing dialogue and fast-paced action.

Howard Chaykin writes the adaptation to the book and admirably remains true to all the original ideals. Mike Mignola and Al Williamson's art put the icing on the cake and confirm this book as a masterpiece of fantasy.

Review by Sheldon Bayley

Renegades
Shaun Hutson
MacDonald: £12.95 H/b
Published January 1991

In keeping with his last three novels, Hutson eschews for the most part the more traditional elements of horror novels and forays into a more contemporary world of terrorism and its attendant spin-offs, arms dealing and counter-terrorists.

BOOKS REVIEWS

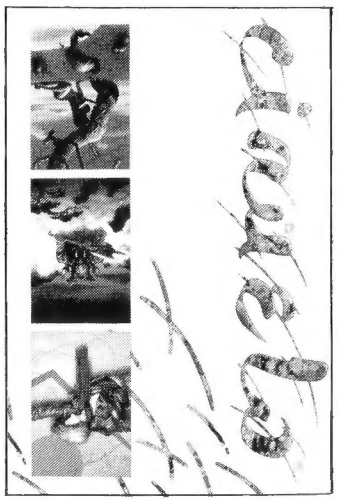
In **Renegades**, we are catapulted into the violent, nihilistic world of Sean Doyle, a counter-terrorist working for the British Government, whose brief is to locate and destroy a splinter group of the I.R.A. responsible for wrecking the most open and promising peace-seeking mission at the Stormont ever.

Whilst on his quest, Doyle encounters David Callahan, a ridiculously wealthy gun runner, and his wife Laura, whose endless search for pleasures Earthly and unearthly eventually lead them to Gilles de Rais, an infamous Fifteenth Century French occultist whose crimes against humanity were as obscene as they were legion. Callahan hopes, with the aid of Gilles de Rais, to achieve immortality, only one man can stop him, Sean Doyle.

At times Shaun Hutson's descriptions of conflict and mayhem (of which there are many) have a balletic quality in their orchestration, similar to Sam Peckinpah and Brian De Palma. Shaun must also be applauded for his meticulous research into armoury and the damage wreaked on the human form.

All in all a racy, action-packed novel for those only with steely nerves and a resolute heart; if said heart is still located within its parent body then so much the better!

Review by Dean Meehan



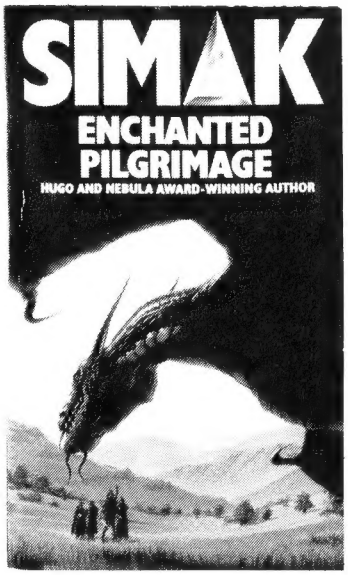
Ciruelo

Paper Tiger: £14.95 h/b £9.95 s/b
128pp. c.120 colour illustrations.

Featuring the work of Ciruelo Cabral, a 27-year-old Argentinian artist whose work may well be familiar to many of you. Despite his tender years, Ciruelo has a huge reputation, and has done professional illustration in many fields, including book covers for the **Forgotten Realms** series, Philip Jose Farmer, David Eddings, and Brian Lumley, and is certain to have a long and sparkling career ahead of him.

With a perceptive commentary by Nigel Suckling, the book reveals the work of an astonishingly talented individual, with pieces ranging from the abstract to incredibly detailed realism. Any fan of fantasy artwork cannot afford to miss **Ciruelo**, especially with this kind of price tag!

Review by Gerard Birkill



Enchanted Pilgrimage

Clifford D. Simak

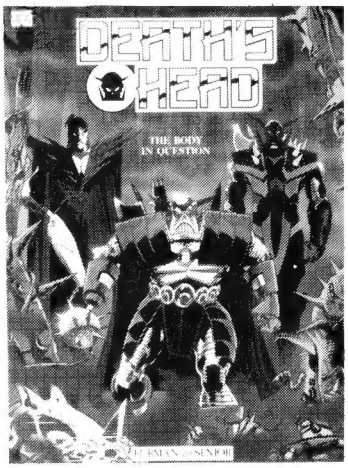
Mandarin: £3.99 218pp.

Simak avoids his more usual choice of genre and goes in for an almost Gene Wolfe-style fantasy setting with hints of technology in the background.

The tale is of a band of travellers, thrown together by chance, who journey through an alternate Earth to fulfill various quests, but with essentially a common goal. They must travel through the wasteland, a country inhabited by goblins, hellhounds, harpies and worse, a country inimical to humans. The group journey on in hope of finding an elder civilization against all odds.

That said, the story is almost humdrum in that it concentrates on the characters rather than some ethereal, vaguely defined goal as so many novels do. Not Simak at his best, but still far above the run of the mill.

Review by Gerard Birkill



Death's Head: The Body In Question

Simon Furman & Geoff Senior

Marvel: £6.95 68pp.

Old blood feuds are in the offing as Death's Head, the robotic bounty-hunter proves an unwary catalyst of sorts. Parental rivalry also rears its head in an unusual manner ... well, not unusual for comics I suppose. As one long piece, it hurtles along with a brash early **2000AD**-ish approach, Senior's art not too dissimilar to that of Kevin O'Neill's in parts. A manic adventure story, on which level it should appeal to British readers, and just enough plot tie-ins to the Marvel Universe to entice the American market.

Review by Paul H. Birch

The Divide

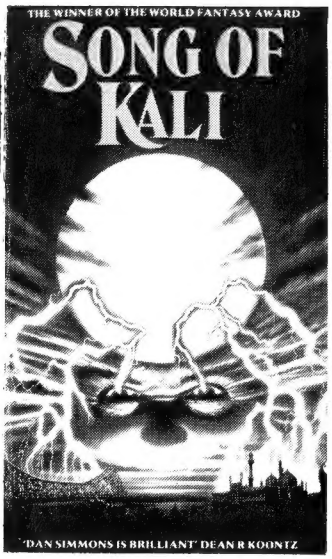
Robert Charles Wilson

Orbit: £6.99 249pp.

John Shaw is a functional superhuman. The product of a CIA-backed experiment in foetal engineering, he was raised as a normal child by foster parents inadequate to the task. How do you socialise superman? Not the way they did it, at any rate. The result is that Superman John creates an alter-ego, Benjamin, to run his life for him. As an adult, he has no need of Benjamin. Yet Benjamin comes back to haunt him.

A rattling good read that will also make you think.

Review by Liz Holliday



Song of Kali

Dan Simmons

Headline: £3.99 311pp.

Song of Kali recounts reporter Robert Luczak and his family's foray to Calcutta in pursuit of the renowned Indian poet M. Das - who by all accounts had disappeared eight years previously only to surface again - bringing with him new works which Luczak hopes to publish. What on the surface appears to be a simple assignment soon turns into a bizarre trip through the nightmare world of Calcutta and its underground religious cults; one of which is dominated by the evil influence of the vile goddess Kali, who demands human sacrifices - but in return promises something ultimately more horrifying.

Having never heard of Simmons I went into this blindly but was encouraged by the fact that **Song of Kali** was the winner of the World Fantasy Award. However, upon reading the book I found the basic theme to be choked by a sense of over-treatment and a somewhat dry narrative. This marred an otherwise thought-provoking and interesting read.

Review by Sara Bayley

The Cartoon History of the Universe

Larry Gonick

Penguin

Mr. Birch has still not rendered the review unto us. His only comments: "Any parent who doesn't get this for their kids at Xmas - is a bad parent! Any adult not placing it on their coffee table - fails in the Yuppie stakes. Anyone not bothering to leaf through its pages on the most casual of glances is beneath my contempt!"

It's fairly obvious the review will not appear until next year ... We faithfully promise it within the next 12 months!!

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